Prosthetic Agency

Literature, Culture and Masculinity after World War II

Gill Plain

PROSTHETIC AGENCY

Prosthetic Agency: Literature, Culture and Masculinity after World War II examines the social and psychic upheaval of demobilisation. It maps the rapid transition from wartime regimentation to individual responsibility, from intense homosociality to heteronormative expectations, from normativity to disability and from uniformed masculinity to domestic citizenship. This book considers some of the many ways in which popular culture of the time sought to mediate these difficult transitions, exploring films, popular fiction, memoir and biography. In particular, it explores how technology was imagined as a new space of masculine becoming and how disability was written, represented and assimilated. Through a focus on popular narrative, this book explores the modes of masculinity promoted as ideally suited to national reconstruction and tries to make sense of a culture of rehabilitation that could not name or know itself as such.

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DANGER ! MEN AT WORK !

'Danger! Men at Work', Henry Standen, *The Guinea Pig*, April 1950, 17

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Introduction

◈

> [P]rosthesis is not only the pieces of wood, iron, now plastic that replace the missing hand or foot. It is also the very idea that you can *replace*. The image of the maimed person and of the society around him becomes prosthetic. Replacement, re-establishment of the prior situation, substitution, compensation – all this now becomes possible language.[1]

> 'But what's going to happen to them pongos [soldiers] after the war? What'll they do when there's nobody's guts to rip out?'[2]

> '… you're one of the lucky ones. You're back.'[3]

Over the course of the masterclass in disorientation that is Henry Green's *Back* (1946), the repatriated prisoner of war Charley Summers – who has lost his leg, his lover and his liberty – finds himself adrift in a world of platitudes. 'We all of us came back to what we didn't expect' announces a fellow veteran, while a bereaved civilian finds consolation in newspaper psychology: 'only the other day in my paper I read where a doctor man gave as his opinion that we were none of us normal'.[4] The papers are right: neither Charley nor the civilian world he attempts to navigate are remotely 'normal', and by the end of the book, his combination of

obsession and inarticulacy has put his job in peril. But here, too, there is a platitude waiting to be deployed. 'To put it in a nutshell,' announces his well-meaning employer, 'after the bad time you've had, you want to marry and settle down'.[5] Green's oddly sympathetic satire equally puts the postwar in a nutshell, and in these three tropes – the uncanny transformation of the known world, the psychological damage done by war and the glib promise of idealised heteronormativity – *Back* diagnoses the cultural losses that demand the repair of prosthetic agency.

This study is mobilised by the absence of war and the ramifications of its loss. War is, arguably, the dominant trope enabling male agency in twentieth-century Western culture: the source of archetypal narratives in which men become men by putting on uniform.[6] Yet, by the time the Second World War drew wearily to a close, the British public had lost its appetite for conflict and audiences sought alternatives in consolations as diverse as costume melodrama, hard-boiled fiction and the novels of Jane Austen. This revulsion from the plots of war was a sign of things to come. In 1945, a culture exhausted by six years of hardship and anxious about what service life might have done to its men met those men returning home, each with their own hopes, expectations and problems. The result was a strange hiatus in narrative conventions, a period of popular cultural realignment and a concerted socio-political attempt to reconfigure gender.

In the formative myths of masculinity, men leave home to seek their fortune: they depart, in actuality or in the imagination, in search of adventure. Yet, demobilisation is a story about homecoming and after the hero's return comes quotidian domesticity, a normality long desired but seldom found sustaining, and largely at odds with the myths through which masculinity is encultured.[7] Consequently, with the war at an end, masculinity, both lived and imagined, was in need of redirection and yet, simultaneously, in order to be *masculinity* – the absolute other of a femininity equated with domesticity, passivity, dependence and vulnerability – it had to remain exactly as it had always been: active,

outward, strong and impermeable. This paradox underpins postwar popular narrative, and the texts explored throughout this book are all – across different media and genres – engaged in the search for new plots through which the threatening legacy of wartime aggression could be contained, and new possibilities of heroic male agency conceived. *Prosthetic Agency* examines the role played by stories in the post-conflict repurposing of masculinity; its primary focus is a cultural microcosm – Britain 1945–1960 – a period that encompasses the war's end, the beginning of the nostalgic retelling of that war and the coming to maturity of a new post-conflict generation of young men.[8] The chapters that follow consider thrillers, adventure stories, male melodramas, biographies and memoirs, all of which are linked by an underpinning assumption. They are all fictions of 'prosthetic agency', stories that demonstrate the difficulty of social reintegration and acknowledge – more or less consciously – that postwar man needed props to facilitate his transformation into a viable domestic citizen body.[9] In the aftermath of the unprecedented cultural dislocation of the Second World War, and the peculiar unmanning of demobilisation, this is a book about how stories remade men.

Setting the Scene: Fictions of Man-Making in a Prosthetic Culture

Stories, repeated often enough, have remarkable potency and exist in a complex symbiosis with other determinants of socio-political belonging: they shape – and are shaped by – the acceptable limits of cultural legibility. Crucially, popular narrative determines gender roles and yet is, in turn, confounded by the complexity of gender. Masculinity and femininity are far from stable, in this or any other period, and the tensions and inconsistencies of representation expose both emergent ideas and the reactions against them. Popular fiction and film, widely read and watched, tell us what was 'in the

air'; they capture a sensibility and encode, with varying degrees of subtlety and success, the desires, anxieties and preoccupations of a population. They are not a stable source of meaning: cinema, in particular, emerges onto the screen as a hybrid creation shaped as much by economic pressures as by any vision that writers, directors or producers might have cherished for their project; and there are limits to any generalisations that can be founded even on the basis of a novel's bestseller status.[10] But it nonetheless pays to scrutinise these fictions, and to respond to them with the same care and attention that we might bring to the more exclusive products of high culture. 'Literature', argues Allan Hepburn, 'provides one way of accessing the historical transformations of citizenship and rights that happened around 1945 because it imaginatively configures social relations among individuals'; the same might be said of the thrillers, biographies, middlebrow melodramas and adventure films considered here.[11] These stories give us access to cultural understandings of gender that may now be residual but which cannot be said completely to have disappeared. They equally expose the foundational role played by gender in postwar reconstruction. In a world in which so many certainties lay in ruins, and in which so much had been lost, the restoration of conventional peacetime gendered roles, and all the security they symbolised, must have seemed one of the more straightforward tasks of reconstruction. That this 'cultural demobilisation' would prove less easy than imagined is all too evident from the texts that populate this study.

How, then, might culture, agency or narrative be seen as 'prosthetic'? Some answers lie in the rhetoric of the postwar. As Henri-Jacques Stiker observes, the process of reconstruction is contingent on promises. In the *rebuilding* of towns, the *restoration* of gender roles, the *rehabilitation* of bodies, society imagines itself capable of replacing what has been lost. Homes will be *re*built, the displaced will be *re*placed, the wounded will be *re*paired, the irreplaceable dead will be *re*membered, transformed, transfigured, *re*instated as idealised memory. But they too will be *replaced*: their substitution enabled by the processes of resurgent heteronormativity

and endorsed by pronatalist discourses that demand new citizens to regenerate nation and empire. And then there will be compensation in the return of lost pleasures and the emergence of a shiny new consumerist modernity that will offer *reward* for years of deprivation with the promise of tangible products for the newly prosthetic home.[12]

Yet, there is a problem underpinning the economy of replacement. The prosthetic home is both a benchmark of male endeavour and a substitute for the modes of masculine becoming that characterise war; it is a reward, a consolation and a constant reminder of lack. The breadwinning male, judged by his 'possessions', may acquire the objects that signify success within the structures of a peacetime economy – wife, children, car, property – but unless these commodities achieve hyperbolic proportions, they cannot compensate for the loss of idealised masculinity. The popular crime novelist John Creasey, whose innovative procedural fictions offered the police force as an alternative to the military as a means of cultural man-making, encapsulates what is missing: 'Women simply can't understand that a man *has* to have some adventure, what would life be like if there wasn't any danger?'[13] The crucial condition embedded in this question is risk. The masculinities of modernity all depend to a lesser or greater extent upon an economy of risk in which a willingness to encounter danger, pain or the unknown determines cultural value. Risk is also, as Elaine Freedgood persuasively argues, a means of managing anxiety. Taking risks – by, for example, climbing perilous mountains for 'sporting' pleasure – provides a sense of control over powerful external forces and over the fallible human body.[14] Drawing on Deleuzian masochism and the Freudian death drive, Freedgood reads Victorian mountaineering narratives as exemplary instances of 'a voluntary engagement with pain, one that seems to enable its participants to meet, and conquer, whatever the future holds'. Equally, they demonstrate that the repeated casting away of security, while painful, brings the reward of agency.[15] To encounter danger, then, is pre-emptively to manage

loss, and to take control of a world characterised by an 'unprecedented proliferation of exigencies'.[16] Freedgood is writing of the new dangers of industrialisation, disease, market capitalism and empire, but the world of 1945 – characterised by global geopolitical transformations and fearsome technological innovations – appeared every bit as demanding to the demobilised men who faced it. Furthermore, these men encountered, like the Victorians before them, a peculiar state of domestic discomfort. Freedgood's mountaineers were driven, at least in part, by the perception that middle-class England 'had become so safe and secure that it had lost all possibility of providing challenge and difficulty'.[17] Departing abroad to encounter more testing circumstances was a popular solution. Shifting the understanding of risk from a temporal construct – pertaining to an unknown future threat – to a concrete spatial location again makes danger manageable and, in the twentieth century, does much to explain the thriller's fascination with a Europe imagined as lawless and threatening, a place where the dangers of war might pleasurably be re-enacted. But the paradoxical fear of safety that drives the male subject away from the comforts of home is simultaneously a fear of absorption into the feminine, a state imagined as passive and suffocating. In Creasey's world, and the worlds of the writers I will go on to discuss, gender difference threatens to make the home uninhabitable. Postwar fictions stress, time and again, that women cannot understand the pressures of masculinity and the anxieties that must be managed through risk, whether manifest in employment, sport or fantasy. Neither can they understand the pleasure and reward of this encounter with pain. In narratives of man-making, then, risk is ubiquitous. It is present in the unknown futures of the postwar world, and it is present in the very space of the home, which can be, at best, an inadequate prosthesis for the lost certainties and radical presentism of war.

The prosthetic home also suffers from a failure of authenticity. It is not as it should be. In her insightful analysis of what is, arguably, the exemplary narrative of post–Second World War homecoming,

William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947), Kaja Silverman suggests that:

> The hero no longer feels 'at home' in the house or town where he grew up, and resists cultural (re)assimilation; he has been dislodged from the narratives and subject-positions which make up the dominant fiction, and he returns to them only under duress. … Sometimes the veteran also finds himself strangely superfluous to the society he ostensibly protected during the war; his functions have been assumed by other men, or – much more disturbingly – by women.[18]

The uncanny dissonance of homecoming cuts across cultural and political differences, and Silverman's diagnosis of an American malaise transcends national boundaries. The dislocation she describes is, in a British context, the result of actual change – conscription, evacuation, rationing and unprecedented government controls ensured the radical reinscription of the home front – but it is equally the product of an idealisation of 'home', a process that in many ways mirrors the construction of the 'soldier hero'. Even though total war engulfs domestic space, bombing cities, displacing families and sending women into the public sphere, a fantasy of home remains an ideal for which men fight, and which they expect to retain a certain configuration: usually, an idyll embracing a devoted wife, compliant children and a well-tended hearth with pipe and slippers.[19] That this ideal should survive unscathed is no more possible than that men should return from war unchanged and able immediately to reassume a quotidian peacetime existence. Consequently, as Alan Allport observes, by the end of the war, the relationship between soldiers and civilians was distinctly ambivalent: 'a society which had held together so well for six years of total war seemed to be coming apart in peace'.[20] The reasons for this collapse were multiple, but key among them was a complex grieving process that combined the tangible loss of possessions, places and people with a more nebulous, but nonetheless disorientating, loss of

purpose and group identity. It is not that all service roles were exciting – although many men undoubtedly found civilian life boring after their experiences abroad – but rather that the contexts of military life are fundamentally different to most peacetime existences. Gone are the homosocial structures and systems of care – medical, financial, educational – integral to the armed forces; in their place comes personal responsibility and choice. No longer part of a group, distinguished by a uniform, men must once again become employees and a constituent part of families: husbands, fathers, part of what Judith Butler terms the 'heterosexual matrix'.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, cultural demobilisation, and the prescriptions of masculinity upon which it rests, take remarkably coercive forms, and a second preoccupation of this study is thus the (re)construction of British masculinities. Gender identities are contingent, subject to change in response to social, cultural and political pressures.[21] They are equally 'intersectional', complicated by other culturally significant determinants of identity such as class, nation, race, sexuality and ability. Yet, as Anthony Easthope has argued, much of the mythology that surrounds masculinity in Western culture depends upon ideas of consistency, solidity, permanence and resilience – on being 'one substance all the way through'.[22] Men do not cry; they contain or repress their emotions, a characteristic particularly pronounced in the national context of mid-twentieth-century Britain, where understatement, euphemism and banter dominated male discourse. Ideas of the national character demanded reticence and restraint, creating an ideal male body whose impermeability was as much a facet of verbal withholding as physical strength. In stereotypes of wartime male agency, the phlegmatic British man does not need to speak of himself. Instead, he quietly triumphs through ingenuity rather than brute power, a vision of hegemonic masculinity shaped by factors ranging from the need to distinguish British nationalism from its signifying Nazi other to what Krishan Kumar has termed the ironic modesty of empire: 'When you are in charge,' Kumar argues, 'you do not go about beating the drum'.[23] But the unspoken power

and signifying absence of Englishness has consequences for masculinities across the wider British state, generating gendered subjectivities and national stereotypes that have no language for self-reflection.[24] Later in this introduction, I explore in more detail the construction of wartime masculinities, predominantly invested in and authorised by uniform, and the emergence at war's end of narratives that sought to reinstate the cultural value of civilian identities; but my point here is that a culture of emotional inarticulacy, heightened by wartime's insistence on the repression of private desires and the 'self-watching censorship' of the imagination, complicates still further the already resistant matter of seeing, understanding and analysing the unexamined norm that constitutes white British masculinity.[25]

Other factors are complicit in the shaping of the mid-century male psyche. Patriarchy has long encouraged men to emulate father figures, to strive, to achieve and to live up to expectations grounded in a competitive ethos. In the conventionally gendered landscape of the twentieth century, masculinity is figured as a mode of becoming – a separation from and, ultimately, a triumph over the feminine and domestic.[26] War, within this framework, acts as a crucial man-making mechanism. It takes the man out of the home, giving him economic stability and the appearance of public agency; and it offers at least the potential for heroism, an intangible cultural value endowed upon those men deemed most successfully to have performed their military role. For a generation coming to maturity in the shadow of the Great War, warrior masculinity assumes a peculiarly abject potency: attractive and repulsive in equal measure, it is imbricated in the negotiation of patriarchal obligations. Sons have a duty to lost fathers, a need to know the reality of combat and prove adequate to its demands. And in the twentieth century, the opportunity to do so is newly, and non-optionally, available to all – or, at least, to all those fit for conscription within the mass armies of 'total' war. Military man-making thus embraces a far wider demographic than had been the case in earlier centuries. Between 1939 and 1945, men who might never have imagined becoming

soldiers – nor indeed ever wanted to become soldiers – found themselves conscripted, processed and rendered uniform, part of what Alexander Baron calls the 'remote and inscrutable' army machine.[27] Women, too, became uniformed, but they were expected to sustain a double subjectivity, capable of masculine activity while nonetheless retaining an inherent 'natural' femininity.[28] For women in the Second World War, working in factories, serving in the forces, uniform was a costume or a disguise, covering an assumed feminine 'norm'; for men, by contrast, uniform was expected to enable or expose, bringing out supposedly essential male instincts rendered redundant by the cultural effeminacy of peace.[29]

I suggested above that the prosthetic home is an inadequate replacement for the man-making properties of uniform and risk. Rather, the onus for reconstructing male subjectivity falls upon the workplace, and the desire for and negotiation of 'work' is consequently a touchstone of this study. Work, as a term, connotes both effort and employment, and historians of psychic, physical and social rehabilitation all stress its role in enabling functional masculinities. Ben Shephard argues that 'the therapeutic importance of work cannot be underestimated', while Julie Anderson connects the ideology of interwar 'man management' with the mobilisation of newly systematised structures of rehabilitation.[30] Film and fiction of the period are in absolute agreement; they emphasise the necessity of employment even as many men struggled to find it, or to find an appropriate and adequately remunerated form of it.[31] From the anxious former serviceman, exhibiting 'a nervousness he had never shown in Normandy' at the prospect of losing even demeaning employment in Captain W. E. John's *Gimlet Comes Home*, to Nicholas Monsarrat's psychotic ex-commando, who complains, 'You don't know what it's like to try job after job, and make a muck of the lot, and have everybody laughing and looking down at you …', the problems of finding, keeping and adjusting to work permeate the period.[32] Yet, work is simultaneously diagnosed as the only medicine and best remedy for masculine rehabilitation. This is evident in early

prisoner of war (POW) films such as *The Captive Heart* (1946) and *The Wooden Horse* (1950), which stress the vital role of activity in maintaining masculinity. Men who *do* something, whether it be tending gardens or planning complex escapes, tend to survive; those who do not face the annihilating psychic force of 'feminine' passivity.[33] The panacea of work equally shapes the cinema of domestic readjustment, in narratives as diverse as *The October Man* (1947) and *Frieda* (1947). The plots could hardly be more different, but the psychological underpinnings are identical. *The October Man* is a crime thriller in which the damaged hero – newly released from hospital after a traumatic head injury – is accused of a murder he did not commit. Before this catastrophic set-back, however, the film offers a montage sequence of his social rehabilitation, his confidence and social standing restored through steady employment as an industrial chemist. *Frieda* (1947), by contrast, is a domestic melodrama, but again the emphasis is on civic order and employment: as a wise old headmaster tells the hero, 'work does more for us than doctors and costs less'. The novelist Nevil Shute makes yet bolder claims, suggesting, in *Round the Bend* (1951), that absorbing employment and a job well done might form a new religion. In the 'New Maintenance', a unifying faith that emerges from the teaching of a charismatic ground engineer, 'Good work and good living' are seen as indivisible.[34]

In postwar film and fiction, then, work represents security, social integration and psychic stability. It also has the capacity to regenerate the lost homosocial community of war. Work, as imagined in popular culture, is profoundly gendered, with women making at best marginal appearances in the public sphere. As Michal Shapira notes, social and psychoanalytic theory in the period stressed the importance of the family unit in securing 'future social stability'.[35] Full-time motherhood was advocated as essential to the avoidance of delinquency, while fathers 'were envisioned as breadwinner companions, ensuring discipline and responsibly cooperating with the state after the disruption of family life during the war'.[36] Yet, as

indicated earlier, fulfilling such roles was dependent upon men finding socially appropriate work. The problem was approached from a variety of directions. On the one hand, many of the films emerging from Ealing Studios – a production company dedicated to the portrayal of consensual British values – attempted encouragement. Seemingly mundane occupations, from beat policing (*The Blue Lamp*, 1950) to the probation service (*I Believe in You*, 1952) to teaching (*Mandy*, 1952), were presented as rewarding or even extraordinary. This socially responsible film-making met its match, however, in a rich vein of noir cinema in which the struggle to resist the lure of illegitimate work 'opportunities', from the black market to smuggling, became a major motor of plot. In *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947), an ex-Royal Air Force (RAF) officer, Clem Morgan (Trevor Howard), bored by peacetime and too drunk to know better, easily succumbs to criminality. Once exposed to the degeneracy of the criminal underworld, he sees the error of his ways, and the film ends with a tentative gesture towards future redemption; but Clem's descent into crime can all too easily be read as an expression of post-traumatic dislocation, and the lack of 'appropriate' work for men seemingly addicted to risk. The 'social problem' drama *The Intruder* (1953), meanwhile, raises a different spectre of dysfunction, which disturbingly intersects with postwar class anxieties. *The Intruder* suggests the failure of a duty of care: the good soldier Ginger (Michael Medwin), depicted as a brave and honest working-class lad, comes home to betrayal by an ungrateful home front. In the words of his former comrades and friends, Ginger 'never had a chance'. The film, in which Ginger's former commanding officer (Jack Hawkins) becomes a detective trying to make sense of his fugitive status, also raises the question of where, exactly, does responsibility lie for the welfare of the demobbed soldier? The answer, implicitly, is individual and paternal, rather than social or institutional. Ginger, although fresh from a man-making war, needs more than anything the guidance of a father. In this, *The Intruder* blends demob paranoia with emergent anxieties concerning

youth delinquency to produce a hybrid narrative where all roads lead back to the problem of the absent father.

In fiction, too, the fears – and pleasures – of residual wartime violence found ample representation. Less hampered than the cinema by censorship, fiction could take more liberties with the imagination of both crime and punishment, and could more explicitly acknowledge postwar lack. The first edition of John Lodwick's *Peal of Ordnance*, a thriller about an amnesiac sergeant with an aptitude for explosives and a grudge against the War Office, bore a dust jacket blurb that proudly proclaimed that here was 'a book we can recommend to all who have ever wanted to blow up anything. It also tells you how to do it'.[37] Methuen's tongue may have been firmly in its cheek, but the book speaks clearly to the boredom and resentment that fuelled cinema's disconsolate black marketeers. Agatha Christie, too, registered the dislocations of demobilisation, introducing charismatic risk-addicted masculinity into her traditional clue-puzzle crime fiction. In *Taken at the Flood* (1948), the narrative is focalised through the unusual figure of a demobilised woman, former Wren Lynn Marchmont, who has returned to marry her stay-at-home fiancé, Rowley Cloade. She is distracted from this purpose by the attentions of ex-commando David Hunter, who, like Lynn, finds it difficult to settle into a postwar world. Crucially, Christie reveals that both men have been damaged by war: David proves an amoral killer; Rowley proves so frustrated by the cultural emasculation of *not* being permitted a combat role that he turns to violence as a mode of romantic self-assertion. A typically inarticulate Englishman, Rowley cannot speak of his pain, nor of his desire, and it is only Poirot's intervention that stops him strangling the woman he loves.[38] Lynn's restlessness and Rowley's anger hardly seem the ideal basis for postwar reconstruction, but Christie's narrative – like so many other texts of the period – works hard to repair (or disguise) the rupture of wartime. The conclusion is a textbook example of cultural revalorisation: Lynn's interest in Rowley is reanimated by his homicidal tendencies; conventional heteronormativity is reinstated; the wandering woman is restored to

domesticity; the patient endurance of home-front masculinity is recognised as heroic; and the dangerous residue of wartime heroism, as embodied by the commando, is excluded from the postwar community.

Popular fiction also recognises the generational anxieties present in cinema representations of delinquency and criminality. Middle-class cultures were worried about young men who had gone straight from school to war, and who now returned unprepared for the demands of peacetime; they also worried about those who had received far too much of a dangerous education. An attempt at reassurance is provided by Nevil Shute's *The Chequerboard* (1947), in which Dougie Brent, a lethally effective commando, ends up on trial for murder after he instinctively protects himself against a larger assailant. His defence lawyer – also one of the men who trained him – argues that the war, not the individual, is responsible for this death. Major Carter explains how the military weaponised normative masculinity, with the result that a 'simple brawl' became a 'lamentable homicide'.[39] In this scenario, it is not violence that is abnormal, only its intensity and impact, and if Brent is indicted for his new-found superpowers, then so too must be the authorities who trained him. The incident takes place in wartime and Brent is given a sympathetic hearing: he escapes with a six-month sentence for manslaughter. Shute's narrative of reassurance stretches well beyond the character's presentation as a dutiful child responding to the father figure of legitimate wartime authority. Concluding the defence and addressing both his 1944 courtroom and Shute's 1947 readership, Carter asks how the postwar public will be 'protected from the homicidal crafts that [Brent] has learned'.[40] The Major's answer to his own question takes the nation's fears and doses them with bromide, encapsulating both the fantasy of an orderly demobilisation and the ideal of domestic citizenship:

> When the war ends and Corporal Brent puts off his uniform and puts on his civilian clothes and walks out into Civvy Street, all these dread arts will be sloughed off like his uniform. In three

> months after that you will find him thinking only about motorcycle races or the wallflowers in his garden, and when at times he is reminded that he once killed men in brutal physical assault, he will be filled with wonder that that same man was he.[41]

Shute's optimism was not widely shared. As the earlier discussion of *The Intruder* suggested, a culturally infantilised working class was not trusted to make a seamless transition from the needs of war to the ethics of peace. Yet, while this anxiety generated monsters, it also recognised betrayal and a failure on the part of a governing class that should have known better. Nicholas Monsarrat, one of the sharpest commentators on the casualties of demobilisation, offers a typically dark reworking of *The Intruder*'s concerns in his short story 'Licensed to Kill' (1958). Here, the rogue element is not a naïve and ultimately recuperable Ginger but, rather, an ex-commando who shows no interest whatsoever in a word of fatherly advice. The story's unnamed narrator has set aside wartime homosociality and his role leading a group of authorised killers for the rewards of well-to-do heteronormativity. Comfortable and complacent – he introduces himself as 'the world's most placid chartered accountant' – he is shocked to discover one of his old commandos haunting his idyllic South African honeymoon.[42] While the narrator has, seemingly, made a flawless transition from war to peace, his former comrade, who rejoices in the name 'Murderer Martin', has not fared so well. Martin's very literal nickname is a testament to his aptitude for warfare, and he has not been able to relinquish the skills that brought him so much pleasure. As a series of murders rocks the sleepy South African town, the narrator is confronted by his complicity in the crimes:

> As if Martin were my own manipulated puppet, I knew that he had done it, and I knew why. It was not just for the fun of killing, though that was something which the war and I myself had implanted in him, long ago. It was his only way of

> demonstrating his strength and cunning in a hostile world, a world which for the past twelve years must have seemed determined to prove him futile.[43]

He was, his former commanding officer (CO) concludes, 'my own creation'.[44] These images turn the CO into a modern Frankenstein, a man who has made a monster and – repulsed by what he has made – abandoned parental responsibility. The working-class creature's actions, the story suggests, are equally the responsibility of a middle-class officer elite with the resources to shake off the residue of war or, at least, repress it beneath the calm façade of accountancy. The narrator, confronted by the legacy of his wartime actions and 'aware of bereavement and an enormous guilt', ultimately reveals the limits of his own domestic citizenship. Meeting Murderer on the beach, he efficiently dispatches him.[45]

Murderer Martin was not fit for the postwar world: 'I was only *living* properly while the war was on,' he declares.[46] He is one of many fictional characters unable to conform to the ethos of restorative capitalist employment that was integral to domestic citizenship; he was equally unwilling to submit to work as a disciplinary force, refusing the perceived humiliation of conformity after a war spent exercising his skill and power. Having enjoyed spectacular masculinity, he cannot accept a more quotidian norm. Yet, for some veterans, that norm, and its characteristic invisibility, represented an ideal to be achieved and a challenge of 'man-making' proportions. While the first half of this study explores the technological modernity through which new modes of peacetime man-making were imagined, the second turns to the more literal rehabilitation of damaged bodies and minds. Disability figures large in the fictions of the postwar, yet, it is seldom directly confronted: a casualty of the national reliance on euphemism and silence that inhibited the negotiation of post-traumatic states. Physical disability was slightly easier to countenance than psychological damage, and, in consequence, limps and scars do heavy lifting as symbolic

representations of unspeakable states.[47] Exceptions to this refusal to look, and to the generic tropes of disability representation, can be found in the memoirs and autobiographies of veterans, many of whom struggled to narrativise disability and the non-normative body through resistant, sometimes confrontational, modes of self-assertion. These strategies were ultimately limited by both Stiker's culture of rehabilitation – the assertion that disability was a transient and reparable condition – and by long-ingrained national modes of self-presentation. Emotional inarticulacy is a clear continuity linking wartime and postwar masculinities: men could not – indeed, were encouraged not to – talk about their pain and distress.[48] Equally, the available frames through which disability could be figured, while expanded by war, remained tied to 'denigrating' tropes of heroic suffering and the overcoming of adversity.[49] In this context, popular fiction, film and life-writing took different routes to the shared goal of reassuring audiences that broken men could be repaired, and that the wounds of war, both psychological and physical, could be healed or, at least, rendered invisible.

As this brief survey suggests, peacetime culture needed to divorce traditional masculine attributes – self-confidence, assertiveness, strength – from the threatening context of war, producing an ideal British man who is courageous yet sensible, somehow achieving a carefully calibrated balance between self-control and risk. The contradictions here are evident, but fictions of the postwar period nonetheless demonstrated considerable creativity in the process of imagining 'safe' masculinities. From home-loving test pilots to heroic bureaucrats, masculinity was redeployed and rehomed through a series of narrative prostheses: plots that rebuilt postwar men. These plots will be the focus of the book's chapters; this Introduction now turns to a more considered mapping of mid-century British masculinity. In the next section, I consider the hegemonic modes that shaped this period: the residual wartime masculinity that haunted the postwar imagination and the new 'domestic citizenship' that popular narrative would struggle to

accommodate and promote. Throughout, I draw on fiction and film to demonstrate the extent to which the popular imagination was permeated – and constrained – by gender and class conventions.

From Warrior Heroes to Domestic Citizens: Ideal Masculinity in Transition

> I felt the need to sort out the impressions of the last year dispassionately; and as I had made brief notes in my diary from time to time, it [hospitalisation] seemed a good opportunity to expand them into a narrative, if only to get off my chest the reactions and emotions resulting from my first campaign. These, it seemed to me, had changed my outlook completely. I had landed in France a boy; I like to think that I left it a man.[50]

It is something of a truism to suggest that British culture was traumatised by the First World War. To judge by the cultures of mourning established at both national and community level; the memoirs that relived the war experience and the crime fictions and crossword puzzles that repressed them; the considerable increase in membership of pacifist organisations, and the medical profession's growing acceptance that fear might be a 'natural' reaction to total war, the British public accepted – at least to some degree – Wilfred Owen's poetic assertion that the myths of glory and heroic sacrifice had been laid to rest. There was, as Alison Light has argued, a 'considerable sea-change in ideas of the national temperament'.[51] And yet, simultaneously, nothing changed. In popular novels and juvenile fiction, boys' papers and the new medium of the cinema, what Michael Paris terms the 'pleasure culture of war', survived largely unscathed:

> Throughout the inter-war years, then, not only was there a determination on the part of many people to remember the war,

> but to do so in heroic terms. The novels, stories, illustrations and films which reconstructed 1914–18 as the great adventure remained popular with boys and young men, and in many instances this fiction was created by men who had direct experience of the war and were presented to the youth of the nation by parents, schoolteachers and churchmen, many of whom had themselves served in the war. Yet they consciously made the decision to pass on to the next generation a basically heroic and justified construction of the war. This attitude even survived the outpouring of the novels and memoirs of disillusioned veterans, who by the late 1920s had come to believe that the war had been a futile massacre of the innocents.[52]

Paris carefully distinguishes between the perceptions of young intellectuals and mass popular writing shaped by uncritical memorialisation and a persistent romanticism, but it is perhaps Sapper's Bulldog Drummond who, in 1920, at the opening of his first adventure, most effectively explains why the literature of men and boys needed war: 'Peace', he complains, is 'incredibly tedious'.[53]

The remarkable persistence of war's appeal, however, cannot solely be attributed to popular fictions or nostalgic memory. Indeed, it is a significant feature of the writing of a new generation of young men who signed up to fight in the Second World War. Although conscious of their literary precursors' indictment of war's futility, the memoirs and fiction of combatants such as Keith Douglas, Richard Hillary and Evelyn Waugh also suggest the potent shaping forces of Oedipal anxiety and a desire for knowledge. James Campbell's concept of 'combat Gnosticism' proposes that first-hand experience of battle cannot be conveyed to those who have not fought. The poetry of the First World War, he argues, bears witness to the horror of war, and ostensibly seeks to communicate it, while simultaneously insisting that only those who have experienced this horror can fully comprehend it.[54] Combat is not an experience that can be articulated or transmitted: it has a perverse, traumatic exclusivity.

The generation who fought in the Great War had had this experience. They had encountered the ultimate test of masculine becoming and had not been found wanting. Their sons, by contrast, had had no such crucible and grew up under the shadow of their fathers' knowledge – a knowledge that could not be taught but which had to be experienced. Waugh, in *Brideshead Revisited*, turns this anxiety to comic effect in his account of those too young to have fought flocking to the General Strike in search of man-making opportunities. Douglas writes more reflectively, and cautiously, imagining war as 'an important test, which I was interested in passing'.[55] It is the pilot, Leonard Cheshire, however, who most bluntly articulates what is at stake: 'It is difficult to imagine yourself being fired at and not feeling afraid. Perhaps that is why I am so glad of this war, because I must know whether or not I am a coward.'[56]

Two important points emerge from the psychic landscape of the interwar years. Firstly, that war remained, in the imagination at least, the pre-eminent man-making activity of British culture, and second, that it remained so in a complex and ambivalent landscape, inflected by loss, anxiety and a curious cultural embarrassment about the self-assertion of going to war. Sonya Rose, whose account of the Second World War's 'temperate masculinity' has been justifiably influential, argues that:

> Hegemonic masculinity combined … two contradictory masculinities – one exemplified by the soldier-hero, and the other generated from the anti-heroic mood of the inter-war period and fashioned in opposition to the hyper-masculine German other. But to perform it successfully men had to be in uniform. Lacking a military uniform, working men stressed the heroic features of their masculinity. They drew upon both a language of military battle and a language of working-class manhood in their self-representations.[57]

An effective illustration of the coercive power of the uniformed male ideal is provided by a three-volume series of 'personal records' published during the war: *Fighter Pilot* (Paul Richey, 1941), *Sub-Lieutenant* (Ludovic Kennedy, 1942) and *Infantry Officer* (Anthony Irwin, 1943). The volumes are suffused with exemplary national characteristics, as is evident from the praise with which their publication was greeted. The *TLS* called *Fighter Pilot* 'a grand story, told with the characteristic modesty of the British airman', while Noël Coward praised *Sub-Lieutenant* as 'simply and movingly written, with that typically Naval genius for under-statement'.[58] These comments themselves are no understatements: the books work hard to refute any imputation of heroism, largely stressing the resilience of good cheer and comradeship and even – in the case of Anthony Irwin's Infantry Officer – deferring to his civilian readership on the subject of bombing.[59] Although each is a personal memoir, the books have a distinctly public purpose and the writing is often uneven, veering from the confessional to the official in the space of a few lines. There are also marked differences in tone between the three volumes. Kennedy's self-deprecating and carefully crafted *Bildungsroman* has a light touch and a welcome hint of humour; Irwin's *Infantry Officer*, by contrast, exhibits a brutality and callousness not evident in the previous two volumes. What this says about the differences between the services, and – given the dates of original publication – the different stages of the war, is hard to determine, but Irwin's shocking accounts of summarily shooting a French deserter, slapping a hysterical woman and the sexual desire generated by shelling stand in marked contrast to Richey's chivalric relief at seeing a German pilot's parachute open.[60]

The books were successful enough to merit their republication in a compendium version, *Youth at War*, produced in 1944 in advance of the D-Day landings. The republication also occasioned a foreword by Admiral of the Fleet the Lord Keyes, and it is this mediation that makes explicit the cultural value of uniform. In his

conclusion, Keyes leaves no doubt in the reader's mind as to the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

> I hope this thrilling book will be widely read, particularly by young men, who – owing to the nature of their service in mines, factories and other reserved occupations – are spared the ordeal of battle and the rigours and privations of active service. It can hardly fail to bring home to them the magnitude of the debt they owe to our fighting men, on the success of whose valiant efforts their safety, welfare and whole future entirely depend. It should make anyone ashamed to prolong the agony by striking and holding up, even for a moment, production of vital supplies the fighting men need to achieve victory.[61]

That the military should be so valued is unsurprising; what is perhaps more disturbing to the contemporary ear is the active dismissal, verging on a reprimand, of non-combatant masculinities. While Keyes's specific target is the industrial unrest that disrupted production across 1943 and into 1944, his direct address to men out of uniform brutally makes clear the debt of subordinate masculinities to the fighting forces. It is a coercive ideological exercise that re-enacts a mode of combat Gnosticism that the threat of Blitzkrieg had threatened to undermine. No matter how dangerous and difficult a miner's life, nor how great the jeopardy of civilian populations under bombing, the sacrifice of the fighting man remains supreme. Keyes's comment is unusual in its explicitness. Much literature and film of the war years, by contrast, worked consistently to valorise the home front. Alun Lewis's short story 'They Came', for example, tells of men safe in camp as women die through bombing, while films such as *Millions Like Us* (1943) make heroes of women factory workers and the men who supervise them. And, in a significant contemporary counterpoint to Keyes's pre-D-Day rhetoric, Humphrey Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* (1945) foregrounds the essential role of reserved occupations in keeping Britain afloat during the war.

A Diary for Timothy, a documentary that sets the final phases of the war alongside the first six months in the life of the eponymous Timothy, is a significant postwar text, but in the noble equivalence it affords to pilot, miner, engine driver and farmer, its audience might be seduced into thinking that all men are equal in the communal effort of war. In Jennings's vision, the miner's job is as dangerous as the pilot's: while the pilot begins the film in hospital, we see the miner wounded in a pit accident towards the narrative's conclusion (the dangers, short and long term, of mining were widely acknowledged in the period).[62] The film's propaganda purpose is clear. It is part of a culture of repurposing the nation that anticipates the imperatives of postwar reconstruction – babies are necessary and so are non-combatant men – which is evident in the gradual disappearance of uniformed women from the screen, and the new emphasis on home-making that permeated popular and political culture.[63] *A Diary for Timothy* can be seen as an awakening to the need for new representations of manliness that might shake off the ambivalence associated with the term 'reserved occupation', and its timeliness, as far as the civilian population was concerned, is evident. Kate McLoughlin neatly summarises the unprecedented circumstances of the war's end in Britain, noting the extent of civilian exhaustion and the consequent lack of enthusiasm that greeted returning veterans. 'There was a suspicion', argues McLoughlin, 'that those away in the military had actually had it *easier* than civilians, a suspicion that hardened attitudes in already straightened circumstances'.[64]

Between the reissue of *Youth at War* and the filming of *A Diary for Timothy*, then, we see an astonishingly rapid psychic and social transition: an abrupt shift from the radically coercive environment of total war to its almost equally coercive replacement, domestic citizenship. While war creates an environment in which men are required to become part of a military system and assume the disciplines – some necessarily violent – that this entails, war's aftermath seeks, as rapidly as possible, to undo this conditioning.

Societies undergo a mass process of reintegration that involves not only conventional demobilisation but also repatriation, rehabilitation and the restoration of dispersed families. The challenges of this process, and the construction of a stable 'democratic self', were considerable, as Michal Shapira has demonstrated. Mapping interwar debates about the impact of total war on both soldiers and civilians, Shapira notes that the 1940s were characterised by a significantly increased recognition – within the medical profession and in society more widely – of the role played by fear, anxiety, irrationality and aggression in the formation of the human subject. This knowledge played a foundational role in the construction of the welfare state and was integral to shaping postwar 'ideas about who constitutes the healthy individual capable of being a good citizen'.[65]

Assumptions about gender identities are integral to questions of good citizenship, and the contrast between *Youth at War* and *A Diary for Timothy* equally exposes the (irreconcilable) tensions between a dominant masculinity set soon to become residual and a set of subordinate masculinities struggling to find legible cultural form in a culture perversely both in thrall to and fearful of the earlier hegemonic ideal. As *Prosthetic Agency* will illustrate, wartime masculinities were not easily repurposed and the domestic ideal was repeatedly threatened by atavistic regressions and violent returns: deadly commandos extended their reach far beyond crime narrative, while the once heroic pilot figure mutated into a decadent reminder of wartime excess.[66] These figures continued to appeal and coming to a 'bad end' was not in itself enough to undo the attractions that still resided in uniform. In addition, as the years beyond the war extended, these tensions were supplemented by nostalgia. There is a curious sense of coming full circle, from the rejection of the warrior to his, or her, romantic reinstatement, in the musings of a female veteran in Nevil Shute's *Requiem for a Wren* (1955). 'Until we're dead', she observes, 'the world will always be in danger of another war. We had too good a time in the last one'.[67] Configured in this way, war means pleasure, purpose and an ironic freedom from the responsibilities of peace.

A final consideration in the unstable transition from warrior masculinity to domestic citizenship is the fluctuating significations of class. In the early years of the war, popular culture became an integral part of propaganda efforts to overwrite the hardwired class distinctions shaping British society and the services. The documentary realism of British cinema, for example, replaced heroic middle-class individualism with the 'group hero', a composite figure embodying national diversity in which disparate 'types' – divided by class, region, nation and temperament – were brought together by war and forged into an effective homosocial unit.[68] But the cross-class consensual ideal of the group hero did not translate seamlessly into actual service life. Martin Francis records the emphasis placed on this concept within RAF culture, noting a 'profound and emotional' need for connection among flyers, and a level of informality manifest even at senior level. However, he also observes that 'male bonding was compromised by a variety of potential differences', from squadron rivalries to class divisions and tensions arising from 'national, ethnic and racial differences'.[69] There were, in addition, sharp divisions distinguishing flyers and ground crew.[70] In 'this particular man's world', he concludes, 'homosociability was fragile and contingent'.[71] Jeremy Crang's analysis of the efforts made by the army to 'inspire more mutual respect between the ranks' reveals similar faultlines.[72] His account suggests good intentions on the part of the War Office, but ultimately concludes that much social change was superficial.[73] All too often, democratising initiatives were defeated by the resilience of die-hard hierarchical attitudes among regular officers resistant to change.[74]

The disjuncture between the war's self-proclaimed democratising trajectory and British culture's remarkably persistent social distinctions ensured that the postwar intersection of class and masculinity, on both page and screen, took inconsistent and contradictory forms.[75] Most of the stories this book explores focus on men occupying the multiple gradations of middle-class

subjectivity, a category made all the more indeterminate in this period by the emergence of a new technocratic cadre.[76] Yet, the demands of domestic citizenship, the dislocations of demobilisation and the necessity of prosthetic agency equally shaped narratives of working-class life.[77] In the cinema, these stories coalesced around a range of types: the infantilised child man (discussed earlier) at risk of turning bad and in need of parental care; the tough guy, on either side of the law, a figure derived as much from the authority of the wartime non-commisioned officer (NCO) as from the traditions of crime fiction; the comic 'fools and rogues' who disrupt social conventions through chaos or 'opportunistic individualism'; and the stalwart family man.[78] These types recurred across the popular genres of the postwar, but as a brief survey reveals, the plots and agency available to them changed radically over the course of the period.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Ealing Studios – whose commitment to the concept of a 'national' community and to models of domestic citizenship will be discussed later in the book – attempted to reconcile continuity and change in films such as *The Captive Heart* (1946). This elegiac revisitation of the wartime group hero forges a cross-class, and significantly domestic, community in a German POW camp. The desire for home – indeed, the ability to reconstruct home in its absence – is mapped across the ranks, and nearly all are shown returning to the spaces of normative domesticity. Group heroes also appeared in comedies such as *Holiday Camp* (1947) and Ealing's *Passport to Pimlico* (1949), in which the titular London borough discovers itself to be part of Burgundy and no longer subject to British regulation. The film not only regenerates the group hero, it also offers a farcical recreation of wartime adversity when the plucky British foreigners find themselves blockaded by Whitehall. Yet, Ealing's determination to sustain wartime concepts of an orderly co-operative community is most clearly articulated in the highly successful drama *The Blue Lamp* (1950). The film reactivates the group hero within the police force and negotiates concerns about the stability of society through the

scapegoating of a new generation, damaged by the war's impact upon family structures. The value of home is endorsed by the ideal family at the heart of the drama: PC George Dixon (Jack Warner), his loving wife and their lodger, young PC Andy Mitchell, who becomes a workplace cadet and a surrogate son, replacing the boy the Dixons lost to the war. Alongside this vision of home, and the cheerful, capable community of policemen, the film goes to some effort to distinguish a 'respectable' criminal counterculture from the anarchic threat posed by delinquent youth – a force that recognises neither official nor unofficial laws. This nostalgic vision of criminals who know their place, and who share the authorities' concern with maintaining a social equilibrium, speaks eloquently to the anxieties of reconstruction. It also, again, suggests the incremental reconstruction of pre-war class conventions.

Yet, while civilian cultures reasserted the uniforms of class – clothing, voice, bodies – there is still evidence in early postwar cinema of a cross-class communality of male experience. In *Dancing with Crime* (1947), former soldier Ted gives a speech about the difficulties of demobilisation that echoes the complaints of the bored, risk-addicted Clem, the former RAF officer who tumbles into criminality in *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947). 'Civvy Street', says Ted, is not just a disturbingly changed world, it's one in which 'the job you did before the war seems sort of small'. There is here a parity of emotional experience – a dislocating shift in perspective – that crosses class divides but which, as Monsarrat's commando-turned-accountant suggests, is very much easier to navigate from a position of socio-economic privilege. This combination of shared experience and new barriers can also be traced in early postwar fiction. In Lodwick's *Peal of Ordnance*, the protagonist, Sergeant Tamplin, ruefully notes the re-establishment of class distinctions generated by peace:

> The war was over, and he had observed for some time now that peace was having a distinctly deleterious effect upon Major Watson. This officer, who had once stolen a camel, now showed

> an increasing inclination to secure his transport through normal channels. … Major Watson now wore a tie. Not infrequently he wore service dress. To his sergeants he spoke as might some magistrate to reformed burglars at a dinner of a society for the prevention of crime.[79]

However, the suggestion that Watson is moving comfortably towards a middle-class conformity that will divide him from his crew of bomb-happy sergeants is confounded by events. When Watson is re-encountered later in the novel, he is delighted to be reunited with his NCOs, and wholly sympathetic to Tamplin's amnesia-induced decision to blow up the War Office: 'There's many an officer walking around, and many a squaddie, who'd do the same if they had the nerve.'[80] Veterans, irrespective of class, are united in their discomfort with domestic citizenship and their resentment of a world that has forgotten their sacrifice.

In the initial aftermath of the war, then, fiction suggests that shared wartime experience might cut across the class distinctions being re-established by the structures of domestic citizenship.[81] This would change. As Alice Ferrebe observes, the 1950s are 'irreparably split, genuinely transitional', divided by the humiliation of Suez, the coming to maturity of a new postwar generation, the transition from austerity to affluence and the emergence of a consumer culture that created new configurations of wealth and status.[82] These paradigm shifts registered equally in the sphere of social relations, prompting what Sue Harper and Vincent Porter term a 'decline of deference'. 'Unquestioning obeisance to authority could no longer be taken for granted', they argue; 'there was a shift in the nation's cultural mood and tastes'.[83] This transition would be fundamental to the realism of 'new wave' cinema, but it also changed the narrative possibilities of popular genres. Harper and Porter's analysis of cinema taste in the second half of the decade suggests that 'the working class preferred films that laughed at the upper classes, rather than with them', noting the success of the Boulting brothers' satire *Private's Progress*

(1956) and the triumphant emergence of newly 'oppositional' comedy in the form of *Carry On Sergeant* (1958).[84] The generational divide was crucial to this transition: as a younger demographic became the dominant cinema audience, middle-class taste 'lost its status' as the determinant of a film's popularity.[85] The impact of these transitions was not limited to comedy: they equally reconfigured the new cycle of war films that had emerged in the middle of the decade. Early successes, such as *The Colditz Story* (1955) and *The Dam Busters* (1955), are relentlessly middle class, preoccupied with courageous escaping officers and inspired leadership; only a few years' later, doubt would creep in, undermining British officer-class authority in films such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958). The first of these is a study in skewed priorities, as Alec Guinness's Colonel Nicholson oscillates between over-insistence on rank and a misplaced obsession with British engineering; in the second, the paradigm of *The Intruder* is overturned to show a firm but sensitive sergeant major parenting – arguably, mothering – his collapsing officer.[86]

The decline of deference is equally evident in fiction. In Nigel Balchin's factory novel *Sundry Creditors*, first published in 1953, class distinctions remain powerful. The book concerns a family business undone by conflicting visions of the relationship between labour, capital and modernity, and its central focus is the bullish and arrogant managing director Walter Lang. The widowed Lang has no time for anything except work, so when he discovers that his daughter has been seeing a factory hand, he is rendered almost apoplectic. His horror is shared by the boy's parents. But although Jack, the boy in question, is confident and ambitious, he is not the driving force in the relationship; rather, Lang's daughter Rosamund welcomes it for the escape it provides from a desperately lonely life in which she has been expected, socially and emotionally, to fill the space of her dead mother. She brings the impetus, and the car. Once interrupted by Lang, the relationship disappears from the novel; but the response of all the characters insists upon its impossibility. It is a

far cry from what would happen just four years' later when former NCO Joe Lampton advances upon a wealthy industrialist's daughter in John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957). Lampton is a little older than Jack, and his war experience has both cut him off from parental authority and given him a degree of class mobility; but what really divides him, and Braine's novel, from Balchin is a radical shift in structures of feeling.

Joe Lampton arguably marks the beginning of the end for the narratives of prosthetic agency that concern this book. His background as a POW and RAF sergeant-observer might seem to prepare him to join the disorientated ranks of the demobilised, struggling to adjust to domestic citizenship, but his actual plot trajectory, written from the changing priorities and narrative possibilities of 1957, is very different. 'What happened to me', states the voice of 'old' Joe, looking back on his 1946 self, 'is exactly what I willed to happen. I am my own draughtsman'.[87] Joe is fascinated by the prosthetic accoutrements of masculinity – cars, houses, clothes, watches, alcohol – but their object status is just that. They are targets to be acquired, rewards rather than props for his rehabilitation. This is not to suggest that Joe is untouched by war. His status as an NCO, like his working-class origins, makes his ascent to middle-class employment precarious and conditional, always at a disadvantage in comparison with the established wealth of those whose culture he seeks to infiltrate.[88] It is wholly in alignment with postwar narratives of meritocracy that he should gain access to privilege through being good at his job.[89] Yet, he has achieved this professional competence by resisting conventional narratives of masculine becoming. Giving a mock report on his own war record, and comparing himself to his romantic competitor, former squadron leader Jack Wales, DFC, DSO and Bar, Joe concludes:

> Mr Wales had a distinguished RAF career, which was doubly distinguished by his escape from camp 2001 in 1942. Mr Wales is too modest to wish his exploit to be discussed … It will be

> noted that Lampton, in the same position, made no attempt to escape, but devoted his attention to his studies, passing his main accountancy examination whilst actually a prisoner. This proves – we are anxious to be fair – that he possesses an admirable pertinacity of purpose, since it must have been extremely difficult to study under prison-camp conditions. It does not, however, say much for his manhood or patriotism.[90]

Room at the Top tells a subtly different story to the narratives of prosthetic agency. It does not map painful reconstruction and troubled adaptation to domestic citizenship. Rather, it takes a pre-adapted and purposeful product of the war and maps its attempt to subvert class-bound structures of citizenship through the agency of meritocratic professionalism. That Joe becomes the 'successful Zombie' absorbed into the monstrous collective of a callous, complacent, consumerist culture is the antithesis of rehabilitation. Achieving the ideal heteronormative family does not repair him – except insofar as his financial health improves – it empties, alienates and destroys him. The perception that the achievement of home (even affluent middle-class home) cannot ultimately function as the 'plot' of masculinity is the beginning of a fictional transition that would see the war, the men who fought it and the communities of belonging it generated usurped by new narratives for a new literary and cinematic generation.

Joe Lampton made a fetish of the things that success could buy, from luxury goods to female compliance; the narratives of prosthetic agency, by contrast, find pleasure specifically in the work of technological modernity. It is the process and performance of employment, and, often, the relationship with a machine, that rebuilds the man and makes him fit for citizenship. The machine is a crucial component, not least because British masculinity lacks a language for negotiating the social norms of domestic citizenship and depends upon expressive objects to enable a form of manual articulacy. Communication is triangulated rather than direct, and in

the next section, I consider the relationship between things, words and actions in the construction of postwar masculinities.

Prosthetic Masculinity: Male Subjectivity and its Signifying Objects

As the previous section suggested, uniform might be understood as a wartime prosthesis, an empowering but artificial extension of the masculine self.[91] However, both wartime and its aftermath featured other modes of prosthetic becoming – external elements that enabled the management of the self – most notably, in men's relationship with *things*. The power of things, or, at least, their complex relationship with human subjectivity in this period, should not be underestimated. Fictions of both war and aftermath are replete with inanimate objects that achieve uncanny levels of self-possession, functioning as antagonists or collaborators, companions, interlocutors and components of selfhood. The novels of Hammond Innes are filled with anthropomorphised ships and characters bonding more potently with the inanimate than the animate, while David Lean's film *The Sound Barrier* (1952) makes a national hero out of the prototype jet 'Prometheus', rather than her puny human pilots. But perhaps the most striking example is found in Nicholas Monsarrat's short story 'The Ship That Died of Shame', first published in 1952.[92] Although the story opens with a disavowal – 'if there's one thing I know about [ships], it is that they are *not* alive. They are made of wood and metal, and nothing else; they don't have souls, they don't have wills of their own, they don't talk back' – it is immediately evident that MGB 1087 is a sentient being.[93] Described variously as a woman and a child – 'I raised that boat practically from a toy yacht' – the ship is also a supreme weapon of war, a prosthesis that turns Randall and Hoskins, her captain and first lieutenant, into supermen.[94] At the war's end the two men go

their separate ways – Randall to dislocation and failure, Hoskins to successful black-market criminality – until they are reunited by Hoskins's plan to rescue MGB 1087 from the scrapheap. Initially, this seems like redemption for the narrator, Randall. Although now subordinate to the hyper-confident Hoskins, he is content, salvaged by the power of work, the proximity of the sea and being 'back home in MGB 1087'.[95] Yet, the joy of the reunion is short-lived, as it soon becomes clear that the boat has ethical objections to being co-opted for criminality. Despite all the care the two men lavish upon her, she becomes 'curiously sluggish … human, unreliable, inexplicably disinclined to try'.[96] Ultimately, the ship's self-possession becomes active revolt: as Hoskins attempts to smuggle a paedophile murderer to safety in France, the ship's engines fail and it sinks, drowning Hoskins and his murderous passenger. Only Randall survives to tell the tale, and to speculate as to whether his own shame was translated into Freudian self-sabotage, or whether he simply submitted to the moral authority of the machine.

MGB 1087 is an object that makes meaning and configures human subjectivity. The ship makes Randall a wartime agent; her absence and later abuse are integral to his postwar failures. In his influential study *A Sense of Things*, Bill Brown observes that 'the human investment in the physical object world, and the mutual constitution of human subject and inanimate object', cannot be reduced to commodity, consumption and capital.[97] Instead, things have a more nebulous and challenging role in meaning-making and the management of the self. Focusing on the material cultures of the late nineteenth century, manifest in the works of Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett and Henry James, Brown argues:

> These are texts that, as I understand them, ask why and how we use objects to make meaning, to make or re-make ourselves, to organize our anxieties and affections, to sublimate our fears and shape our fantasies. They are texts that describe and enact an imaginative possession of things that amounts to

> the labor of infusing manufactured objects with a metaphysical dimension.[98]

Belief in the sentience of machines, the collapse of the boundary dividing the human from its others and a recognition of the object world's role in the making of the self pervade wartime literature. Martin Francis writes of flyers' superstitions, frequently channelled through signifying objects, from soft toys to underwear, but more important, and more potent, was the relationship with the aeroplane itself.[99] Franklin, H. E. Bates's wounded flyer in *Fair Stood the Wind for France* (1944), proposes to name his artificial arm 'George' after the automatic pilot of his bomber. In doing so, he reclaims some of the agency lost in the destruction of the plane, a loss which is figured as fundamental to his subjectivity. In the early stages of recuperation after the amputation, Franklin yearns for his revolver, believing that this will go some way towards restoring his agency: in a crudely psychoanalytic fashion, the gun might compensate for his wounded masculinity. Eventually, his French hosts give in and present him with this richly symbolic object:

> Franklin looked at the revolver and saw it suddenly as a pathetic and useless thing. He saw his own belief in it as pathetic. He had become so used to handling a weapon as big as a house, and carrying enough power to wipe out a small town, that he had forgotten there are other sorts of power.[100]

The metonymic relationships between manhood, gun and bomber speak both to the prosthetic agency of wartime and to a state of 'technological depersonalisation'.[101] In Bates's vision, Franklin's rehabilitation must come not through a reinstatement of cyborg agency – the pilot's symbiotic relationship with the machine – but rather through an embrace of conceptual power: the resistance of the French people and a national ideal.

Brown's suggestive theorising also imagines the object's role in the negotiation of anxieties, its ability to 'sublimate our fears and

shape our fantasies',[102] and this is nowhere more profoundly recognised than in Anthony Asquith's 1945 film *The Way to the Stars*, where the object is symbolic and affective rather than a generator of cyborg agency. Conceived as a tribute to Anglo-American relations and skilfully constructed around the domestic–military proximity characteristic of the RAF, *The Way to the Stars* uses expressive objects to convey inarticulable emotions. It also reveals, in the immense signifying power of squadron leader Archdale's cigarette lighter, the crucial role played by things in masculine self-management.[103] Archdale hates to fly without the lighter; it is his lucky charm. When it is lost, so is he, and the object – rediscovered on the ground and appropriated by Archdale's 'cadet' Peter Penrose – becomes a symbol of both past and future, encapsulating the memory of the man himself and a superstitious faith in the survival it might facilitate. It is a tangible piece of luck, passed from character to character as a fetish. In the final shots, it becomes a symbol of the Anglo-American friendship the film was designed to promote.[104] The lighter now resides with the American Joe Friselli, who – like Penrose – is a cadet who has lost his mentor. The two men share a cigarette, wordlessly acknowledging the loss of their father figures and the completion of their competition for the same retiring English rose. The inarticulate British man and the American who speaks too much are joined in emotional restraint. The lighter signifies their unity, the friends they have lost and the sacrifices being memorialised by the film. The male characters of this film, with the notable exception of the covert poet Archdale, need an inanimate object to speak for them, for they can scarcely speak for themselves.

The rules that triangulated emotion through a detached third subject or object, be it engines, mechanisms, averages or form, had been intensified by the war. As conflict applied new demands, and as citizens, male and female, rose to the occasion, they could do little to articulate their emotional response to unprecedented difficulties and – increasingly – unprecedented pain. Writing in 1952, H. E. Bates attempts to explain the intensification of euphemism as the

lingua franca of British masculinity. Describing the flyer's surreal 'life of sandwiched peace and frenzy', he suggests that this 'curious problem of abnormality in living' generated a new outlook and language:

> He brought to it a refined attitude of understatement, a desire to be casual in a low key that was well expressed in his language. He no longer crashed an aircraft; he pranged or wrapped it up. He no longer fought a gallant action; it was a good show. He no longer died; he bought it. All these things united to become a legendary synonym for Britishness. The more closely and harshly war impinged on life the more smoothly, casually and cryptically were the fears of it wrapped up in the veil of language and the cloak of behaviour. War was an embarrassment that simply ought not to be mentioned.[105]

The affectation of such language amounts almost to a mode of camp, a sensibility that, in the words of Susan Sontag, 'converts the serious into the frivolous'.[106] This conversion is exactly the cultural work undertaken by Air Force slang and the equivalent vernaculars of Army and Navy culture: indeed, these are code languages that render understatement excessive, almost flamboyant. But this is not the only linguistic strategy through which men communicated in the period, and it is not one that persisted straightforwardly into the postwar. Camp – emphasising superficiality, affectation and excess, while functioning as the private language of an extended homosocial family – is of limited use for heteronormative masculinities once the prosthesis of uniform has been removed. Air Force slang dates, and it speaks to outmoded loyalties in the era of domestic citizenship, as the plays of Terence Rattigan make clear. Rattigan, himself a master of understatement and implication, maps a significant linguistic transition between his wartime success, *Flare Path* (1942), and *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952). In the earlier play, 'the old vernacular' sustained and protected the vulnerable airmen, their code talk acknowledging impossible pressures without ever making their

suffering explicit. These men could be as frivolous as they liked; their uniforms spoke their seriousness for them. In the postwar portrait of the redundant fighter pilot Freddie Page, by contrast, the language that sustained and protected is now 'an anachronism … as dated as gadzooks and odds my life'.[107] Freddie, who has 'never really been happy since he left the R.A.F.', is a child man, a queer, disorientated figure ill-equipped for the demands of peacetime.[108] He is also unemployed, a failure to adapt that excludes him from the new masculine discourse of the postwar: the language of work.

While it was 'bad form' for men to talk about themselves, they were permitted absolute fluency in subjects of professional specialisation. Clinical, detached, objective, this was an appropriate mode of male discourse, and any aspect of work, or sport, could become a conduit channelling the unspeakable. Examples abound in both cinema and fiction, none more famous, perhaps, than Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter* (1945), in which Trevor Howard's upright professional doctor woos Celia Johnson's respectable middle-class housewife by talking to her, at length, about diseases of the lung. In the realm of postwar fiction, Nevil Shute similarly maps such linguistic displacement, revealing in the process that a profound distrust of the emotions persisted long into the 1950s. A first instance indicates how men must communicate; a second reveals why. In *Round the Bend*, alluded to earlier as a novel that makes a religion of work, the narrator, Tom Cutter, faces a crisis in his business that demands the departure of his closest friend. The loss this represents cannot, of course, be spoken, so the two men take refuge in the novel's unifying language of engineering: 'We talked about the details of the engine overhaul for a few minutes, hard, simple facts that were so easy to discuss'.[109] Six years later, in Shute's profoundly restrained novel of nuclear catastrophe, *On the Beach* (1957), there has been no discernible change in what is expected not just of British masculinity but of men in general. Here, it is made almost comically clear that when men cry, it is a fundamental and unacceptable breach of etiquette. In a world in which the northern hemisphere has been wiped out and the

southern hemisphere is waiting to die, the community of Australian survivors largely avoid the few remaining northern exiles, lest these bereft figures be traumatised by contact with the living. There is a bizarre black humour in the opening chapter as characters debate whether to invite an American to a party. Haunting their decision is the awful memory of a previous attempt to bridge the gap with a British officer:

> He tried to reassure her. 'He's different. He's a good bit older, for one thing. Honestly, he'll be quite all right.'
>
> 'That's what you thought about that RAF squadron leader,' she retorted. 'You know – I forget his name. The one who cried.'
>
> He did not care to be reminded of that evening …[110]

The spectacle of weeping masculinity is so shocking that the squadron leader's name seems to have been wiped from memory. Indeed, his tears form the basis for the now ingrained habit of non-fraternisation. In the end, the Australians resolve their dilemma through a programme of sport and alcohol consumption designed to ensure that the American can never inadvertently encounter any potent signifiers of loss.

If we accept William Watkins's claim that 'emotion is primarily a social construct' and that cultures have a radically variable 'symptom pool' that determines the pain, distress and emotional damage that can legitimately be articulated, then the evidence of postwar popular fiction suggests that British culture in general, and middle-class British masculinity in particular, was possessed less of a pool than a puddle.[111] 'Stiff upper lips', the embodiment of emotional constraint, were inculcated in men by the formal structures and informal taboos of family, school and sport.[112] Mid-century culture depended upon a language of understatement and euphemism, modes of restraint that – while useful in the crisis of war – made the acknowledgement of trauma and loss exceptionally difficult, and the transition to a

postwar sensibility all the more challenging. The repair of the 'prosthetic', manifest as both objects and discourse, compensates for this, and enables the expression of a surprisingly rich emotional sensibility. It may be more often directed at machines than people, but it is nonetheless a means of coping with the aftermath of conflict. And it was also significantly national, finding its apotheosis in the 1945 triumph of Clement Attlee. The Labour leader embodied the virtues of domestic citizenship and understatement. Indeed, his reticence confounded the media's desire for personality and generated repeated challenges from more obviously charismatic figures within his party. However, when it came to the election, he drew approval from across the diverse constituencies of the voting public. His biographer, John Bew, quoting Labour MP James Chuter Ede, observes that 'the country "distrusted brilliant men"', and asserts that it was exactly Attlee's restraint, calm and 'lack of egotism' that enabled the landslide victory.[113] Postwar film and fiction endorses this distrust, turning from spectacular leadership to the unshowy endurance of underestimated men.

As Attlee replaced Churchill and war films temporarily disappeared from the cinema, the unspeakable emotions and coercive normalisation of the aftermath found expression in a range of forms, including melodrama, crime thrillers, life-writing and romantic fantasies of renewed peacetime agency. In the section that follows, I map those genres that will be central to this study and the place of these stories within the broader landscape of British film and fiction.

Popular Culture and the Postwar: Telling Stories

> The Second World War, like other extended conflicts, had profound psychological effects upon its combatants, often making their reintegration into civilian society problematic. …

> [Cinema representations] centred on ambivalent, sensitive, tortured and tormented male protagonists engaged in a moral struggle within their own natures, who are plunged into neurotic self-doubts and a crisis of sexual and social identity. As the cycle of films developed there was a shift from the damaged Everyman to the psychotic and the criminal with a greater capacity for violence.[114]

> The studios seem to think people go to the cinema to listen. They don't. They go to watch. There's a colossal market waiting for a fast-moving ski picture. Plenty of spills and thrills. The world has gone crazy about sport – artificial excitement to replace the excitement of war.[115]

These opening epigraphs emphasise two key components of this project: its concern with the cultural mediation of social anxieties surrounding postwar male adjustment, and its interest in the imaginative strategies designed to distract both men and women from this process. The repurposing of men had to be imagined and represented as much as it had to be enacted in policy and the provision of jobs, and cultural products were integral to this process. However, as far as literary studies are concerned, little attention has been paid to popular fiction of the years immediately following the war. Writing in 1983, Ken Worpole observed that it 'is likely that in the 1950s the most widely read books in Britain were books that dealt with the experiences of male combatants in the Second World War, a cultural phenomenon which literary histories have hardly acknowledged';[116] fifteen years later, John Ramsden concluded that little had changed, arguing that literary criticism continued to ignore the popular middlebrow novelists and memoirists who 'collectively shaped the mass reading public's perception of their subject'.[117] Ramsden's main focus is on film, but his literary examples – including Paul Brickhill's *The Dam Busters* (1951) and *Reach for the Sky* (1954) – demonstrate the extent to which there was a mass

audience for narratives of masculine endeavour. Ramsden and Worpole's argument that this body of writing demands acknowledgement is yet fully to be answered. New work on masculinity and fiction, however valuable, has tended not to encroach too far upon the popular, at least insofar as this category is understood as writing with a wide readership that prioritises narrative over style.[118] Equally, studies of specific genres have tended to work with a broader remit. Michael Paris's *Warrior Nation*, for example, maps popular war writing across the period 1850–2000. Within this framework, Paris argues that in the years immediately after 1945, the remarkably persistent 'pleasure culture of war' – the subject at the heart of his book – was temporarily sidelined by a combination of war weariness and post-atomic, post-holocaust shock.[119] But he nonetheless endorses Ramsden's argument concerning the 'immense popular success' of autobiographies, memoirs and novels by and about veterans.[120]

While the literature of this period has received little attention, film is another matter. From Raymond Durgnat's seminal *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (1970) to Sue Harper and Vincent Porter's monumental *British Cinema of the 1950s* (2003), film critics and historians have mapped the forms, finances, audiences, anxieties and preoccupations of a period in which British cinema found – and arguably lost – its expressive feet. The war generated a so-called golden age of national cinema;[121] the postwar saw this period of distinctiveness, in which an indigenous film culture was able to flourish relatively free of the shadow of Hollywood, gradually eroded by extreme financial pressures, American cultural hegemony and the rise of television.[122] The exceptional circumstances of the Second World War and its aftermath thus combine to create a twenty-year period in which it is possible to speak of a distinctive British cinema, in which plot and character were shaped by a significant number of home-grown conventions. What, then, were the stories that cinema told, and how do they relate to the dominant fictional narratives of the period?

The conventional critical account of British cinema in the 1940s praises the emergence of the documentary realist feature film, a hybrid form that proved singularly well suited to capturing and constructing the mood of the wartime nation. 'The melodrama of everyday life', as Andrew Higson dubs the formula, is a 'relatively distinctive British film genre' that incorporates 'certain features of the documentary idea into the conventions of the domestic melodrama to produce a brand of fiction film which purports to deal realistically with life in contemporary Britain'.[123] These are films that marry the conventions of the 'woman's film' – narratives associated with the home, family, romance and the emotions, usually from a female point of view – with those of 'the more self-consciously masculine realm of documentary and its world of work, dignified manual labour, placed within a rational framework'.[124] This hybrid functioned, Higson argues, because the feminine point of view was abstracted into a generalised humanity and the emotions of the film were managed with restraint. What might thus equally be termed the 'melodrama of polite repression' was, for the most part, critically well received. The same could not be said for the more uninhibited expression of the costume melodramas that began to emerge from Gainsborough Studios in the later years of the war. The richness of these films, their mobilisation of desire and their immense popularity have been the subject of extensive study and they are an important dimension of film-making in the postwar period.[125] The costume melodrama was not, though, the only – or even the dominant – genre across these years, and their refusal of realism needs to be set against a significant body of conventional dramas that negotiate the social problems experienced, or generated, by men.[126]

The 'social problem' film, a self-effacing, unspectacular mode of classical film-making that 'tries to deflect audience attention to the story and away from the processes of narration', is a broad category, but in the postwar period, there emerged a distinctively male version of the formula.[127] In these films, which develop out of Higson's 'melodrama of everyday life', the crisis is one of masculinity and the

once relevant female point of view is not abstracted or generalised but rather marginalised, reduced to a positive display of supportive rationalism or a negative manifestation of destructive solipsistic materialism. These are stories where the male subject must negotiate his relationship to the 'irrational' emotional residue of war trauma, however encoded, and find his way to a socially acceptable and stable embrace of the rational world of work. Yet, for all the genre's ubiquity, once the war was over, it seldom enjoyed a good press:

> The British sociological film, which first appeared as we now know it in the war and then seemed amazingly fresh, bright and pointed, is now firmly – in fact immovably – established: recipe plain-to-stodgy, final taste perfectly predictable; progressive but 'sensible' and all points of view given an airing. First and foremost, it has a Problem (intolerance, colour, crime) and the people are there to illustrate it … It is advertised as searing, thought-provoking, blisteringly out-spoken, but its impact is mild …[128]

Isabel Quigley's description is not kind but it is effective, and it encapsulates a mode of narrative that will be central to this study. Yet, unlike Quigley, I do not consider these stories 'stodgy'; rather, the social problem film, like the crime thriller, is a recognisable formula within which repression and expression struggle for supremacy and in which tidy endings are nearly always at odds with unruly, fascinating and potentially subversive middles. While the disruptive delights of other popular genres in this period, in particular, the Gainsborough melodramas, have been persuasively analysed, the pleasures of the social problem film have flown beneath the radar, in large part due to their emphasis on 'narrative clarity'.[129] Yet, as Mayer notes, the conventions of such film-making are perfectly capable of admitting creativity and expressive techniques. Equally, I would add, they admit narrative tension, contradictions and a significant play of meaning.[130]

The men at the centre of these narratives must deal with their problematic pasts, but they must also negotiate a complex and changing modernity. Social problem films dealing with crime register social anxieties surrounding the rise of delinquency and the decline of deference. More hard-boiled gangster or spiv films indicate not just the disruptive impact of returning combatants but also the pervasive home-front acceptance of black-market moral relativism. In addition, as Christine Geraghty has demonstrated, British society was encountering a new scientific and technological modernity. These changes, somewhat paradoxically underpinned by both a resurgent capitalism and a pervasive bureaucracy, generated new concepts of expertise, new modes of knowledge and new forms of consumption.[131] It was a world that persistently asked men and women to reconfigure themselves in terms of class, gender, desire, employment, education and appearance, a process facilitated by experts in the new sciences of management, psychology and sociology. It was equally a world that resisted such reconfigurations. British cinema of the 1950s, argues Geraghty, may be full of experts and new women, but across its genres, it 'demonstrated a blithe resistance to change, a comic affection for tradition and a sceptical attitude to modernist claims about social and technological transformation'.[132] This duality would have a significant impact on the challenge of imagining new plots for men.

The period 1945–1960 was also one in which cinema as an industry underwent significant structural change. The struggle between tradition and modernity identified by Geraghty is equally that between 'residual' and 'emergent' artistic forms, a tension that was, according to Harper and Porter, 'unusually acute' in 1950s British cinema, 'since it was predicated on a seismic shift in its cultural resources'.[133] Transitions in film finance – from the national to the international – intersected with technological developments within the film industry and changing socio-cultural patterns without. It was a period marked by an 'extreme volatility of audience taste' and an astonishing range of conflicts across all levels of the production process, from finance to distribution to creative

differences on set.[134] Yet, Harper and Porter argue persuasively that this cinema played a 'vital role in the culture and society of the 1950s', responding not only to social but to *emotional* change.[135]

In the immediate postwar period, then, cinema matters.[136] It had a national audience and it played a fundamental part in normalising social roles, reflecting trends and constructing the limits of possibility.[137] Much the same could be said of bestselling fiction: indeed, there had been from the 1920s onwards a 'symbiotic relationship' between the two forms which continued undimmed into the 1950s.[138] This is not to suggest that film and prose fiction are interchangeable: self-evidently, they are not. One is a collaborative production, shaped by the work of screenwriters, editors, designers, cinematographers, directors, producers, performers and – of course – budgetary constraints; the other is an individual production, in theory less hampered by commercial considerations but nonetheless obliged to negotiate a publishing industry with its own pressures and imperatives. In publishing, as in film production, resources were placed behind products perceived as having mass appeal, and it is important to recognise the intermedial quality of popular culture in this period. Books became films and films became books, and, in between, they were adapted for radio and serialised in both written and graphic form in newspapers and periodicals.[139] This raises questions not only concerning what was adapted for the screen but how that adaptation functioned. Brian McFarlane, surveying the theoretical field of adaptation, resists the constraints of fidelity and argues, quoting Christopher Orr, that 'the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film's ideology'.[140] For McFarlane, while film and fiction are united in their reliance upon narrative, a distinction can be drawn between those aspects of a novel that might be 'transferred' to film, appearing relatively unchanged, and those that must rather be 'adapted'; that is, they 'must find quite different equivalence in the film medium'.[141]

Source texts considered here vary between straightforward transpositions and more radical adaptations, but comparison frequently reveals considerable differences between what was considered appropriate to page and screen. The cohabitation of film and fiction in this study is thus also an exploration of expressive possibility: a consideration of how the key narratives of the postwar were mediated and the tensions exposed by their transition from one medium to another. Film, as an economically complex medium, must make money and operate within the demands and limitations of censorship. However suggestive its mise en scène, it can seldom be as hard-hitting as fiction, and time and again, when stories are adapted for the screen they are sanitised or simplified. This is not surprising; what is of interest is how they are altered and to what effect. There are, in consequence, in these pages some exercises in parallel readings that seek to identify the limits of what John Hill calls the 'consensus appropriate to peacetime'.[142]

While the structure of this book is driven by issues of plot, formula and masculine archetype, the work of Ralph Hammond Innes, Nevil Shute and Nigel Balchin is particularly important to the male sensibility I explore. These writers have much in common. All three were popular in the period 1940–1960; their books were widely read, critically respected and internationally reviewed; their stories were adapted across a variety of media forms. Successful films were made of Shute's *A Town Like Alice* (1955) and *On the Beach* (1959); Balchin's *The Small Back Room* was adapted for radio in 1948, filmed in 1949 and televised in 1959, while Innes was both serialised in the popular press and regularly filmed.[143] The curious counterweight to this popularity, so pertinent to the period examined by this book, is that all three writers have now been, if not forgotten, at least critically overlooked. Clive Bloom would argue that this is a defining characteristic of 'popular' fictions – embedded in their time, they seldom transcend it – but this would be too easy a dismissal of writers who genuinely mattered to both consumers and critics, and, indeed, of writers who are still in print today.[144] Rather, we might consider them figures who complicate the dominant genre

patterns of the twentieth century. They invite categorisation within the parameters of the middlebrow and crime fiction, but at the same time trouble those frames, not least because critical interest in these modes has predominantly focused on the interwar period, and – in the case of the middlebrow – on its relationship to women writers. Shute, whose first novel was published in 1926 and his last in 1960, produced sentimental male melodramas so popular that they sold in the millions. Balchin, whose work drew on his interest in psychology and business management, tapped into the zeitgeist of the 1940s, enjoying a fifteen-year period in which he was lauded as both stylistically innovative and compulsively readable, before falling from favour for failing adequately to repeat his success or change with the times. Innes, whose publishing career began in 1937, knew how to repeat his winning formula, but his thrillers do not fit the now well-studied interwar templates of clue-puzzle and hard-boiled detective fiction, nor do they fit the emergent paradigms of cold-war spy fiction and the police procedural. Innes was, nonetheless, still a bestselling writer when he died in 1998. In different ways, all these writers innovated, and they all produced work that – at its best – stands up to scrutiny as both fiction and historical document. To explore their writing is not only to consider their role in the narrative reconstruction of male agency but also to examine a missing link in the story of twentieth-century fiction, and to reinhabit a mindset integral to the formation of 'modern' Britain. Reputedly, Clement Attlee believed that '"rank and file" novelists were a better indicator of the mood of the nation at any given time than the supposed classics or epoch-defining books'.[145] This book takes Attlee's observation to heart.

The other figures central to this study are veterans themselves. War memoirs became a popular genre in the 1950s, and it is beyond the scope of this book to cover the full range of man-making strategies embodied in such retellings of wartime events. However, a sub-category of the memoir, the rehabilitation narrative, is central to the second part of *Prosthetic Agency*, which turns from the agency of objects to the prosthetic power of writing itself. The

autobiographies of airmen who survived the war with life-changing injuries plot a transition from wartime hegemonic status to a postwar shaped by newly non-normative bodies. These bodies, at odds with conventional ideas of male agency, discomfited a culture desperate to believe in the efficacy of rehabilitation, while also becoming symbols of national resilience. In examining the writing and representation of disability, the second part of the volume begins to chart a dimension of post–Second World War culture in urgent need of recognition.[146] The final section of this Introduction, however, turns to a novel that uses a disabled protagonist to encapsulate the tensions between military and civilian masculinities. Nigel Balchin's *The Small Back Room* enjoyed considerable success on its publication in 1943, and attracted the attention of the high-profile filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. In their 1949 adaptation, we find an exemplary instance of prosthetic agency in action.

Prosthetic Agency in Action: The Case of Sammy Rice

Sammy Rice, the protagonist of *The Small Back Room*, has never been in uniform. Having lost his foot in the 1920s (a mishap for which no explanation is given), he is spending the war as a non-combatant scientist: a 'backroom boy'. The familiar diminutive term is revealing, suggesting as it does an incomplete, or even a perverse, masculinity. The backroom boy has not yet grown into a man: if he had, he would be a frontline soldier. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Sammy has something of an inferiority complex. Although he is good at his job, and is not unattractive (as proven by the presence of his long-suffering girlfriend Susan), he cannot get past his failure to conform to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. It is notable that, as first-person narrator, he repeatedly emphasises the size and physicality of the military men he

encounters, from Colonel Holland, 'a huge old boy', to his 'prize specimen' younger brother Dick, a paragon of modest, athletic British masculinity, and – of course – a decorated pilot.[147] It is also the case that Sammy's job sets him at odds with the military men he so admires. *The Small Back Room* establishes science and the military as antithetical. This opposition is not just a matter of the physical types of men involved but also a representation of the two 'disciplines'. In this book, science is depicted as wholly theoretical, soldiering as empirical and practical. The scientists dream up ideas, the bureaucrats exploit them for personal gain and the soldiers get killed trying them out. Balchin may be drawing on earlier, chivalric conceptions of the military, rather than facing the reality of modern mechanised warfare – but it is nonetheless a mind–body split within the structures of masculinity that reminds us that 'real' men *do* rather than think. Masculinity, at least in its British formulation, is constructed primarily through agency. Significantly, this distrust of science and the brain haunts attempts to reinscribe the hero throughout the postwar period.

The Small Back Room, then, operates at the interface between military and civilian masculinities, acknowledging in the insecurities of its protagonist the pressure imposed upon male subjectivity by the hegemony of uniform. But it also, in theory, offers the potential to validate non-conforming civilian bodies and endorse their cultural value: its plot suggests the possibility of *Bildung*, the opportunity for the backroom boy to develop into a frontline hero. Yet the novel categorically refuses this fantasy. Sammy, known for his technological expertise, is approached by Major Stuart, an army bomb-disposal expert who is struggling to find a way to deal with a new and deadly design of delayed-action fuse. In the book's denouement, Stuart is killed trying to defuse one of these bombs, and Sammy, the civilian, steps in to deal with the other. This should, in theory, be an exemplary act of cultural man-making. The task requires phenomenal bravery alongside analytical intelligence, and Sammy completes it – but for one small flaw. After hours of grappling with the device, he is exhausted, and needs physical help

to unscrew the cap from the detonator. Everyone thinks he is a hero, except for Sammy himself, who looks up at Strang, the man who has come to help him, and concludes: 'I looked at him for a moment standing there with his big shoulders and the thick black hair on his chest and I knew I'd lost.'[148] This is almost the end of the book, and the final page gives us a portrait of the scientist hero: a despondent, self-doubting and self-loathing figure who remains marginal to the construct of heroic masculinity. In Sammy's final reverie, we see the almost unbearable pressure of conforming to the masculine ideal:

> The facts were that Dick was dead, and Stuart was dead, and the Old Man was gone and Waring was Deputy Director and I was just where I had always been. The good chaps went and were killed and the crooks got away with it. But I just stayed put.
>
> … If I'd been a bit sillier, or a bit more intelligent, or had more guts, or less guts, or had two feet or no feet, or almost anything definite, it would have been easy. But as it was, I didn't like what I was, and couldn't be what I liked, and it would always be like that.
>
> I thought, 'I'll go home now and hand over to Susan. She's got it all worked out in the way women always have. They don't worry about anything except being alive or dead. And being dead to them means beginning to smell. It'll be all right with Susan. She'll take it and make it into what she wants, just as Strang did. We shall all know, but I'm the only one who'll mind.'
>
> I laughed and said, 'I did it, darling. All by myself, except for half a turn with a wrench. What's that among friends?'[149]

Sammy ends *The Small Back Room* in a state of masochistic self-pity, and in many ways, Balchin's novel is admirable in its depiction of depression, emotional constipation and a sort of pathological

modesty that destroys self-respect. Of the fiction writers central to *Prosthetic Agency*, he is by far the most psychologically forensic. However, it is clear that scientific achievement – one of the concepts that would be integral to postwar rehabilitation and the new Elizabethan age – has not facilitated man-making, and the civilian still cannot compare himself to the soldier hero.

Six years later, in 1949, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, fresh from the success of *The Red Shoes* (1948), adapted Balchin's novel for the cinema. It was, in many respects, a faithful adaptation, preserving Sammy's self-doubt, his alcoholism and the absurdist backdrop of wartime bureaucracy; but one thing that it does not preserve is Balchin's original ambivalent ending. Instead, Powell and Pressburger perform a miracle, in which scientific prowess transforms Sammy (David Farrar) the wounded civilian into a self-confident and authoritative soldier. It is an astonishing deviation from the book. Sammy does not just get his confidence back, he acquires leadership skills, a dominant masculine manner and even a uniform. In a striking final sequence, he promises to resolve the problems of a subordinate, confidently negotiates a new role with the military and reasserts his authority in the relationship with Susan. The catalyst for this change is the defusing of the bomb, but the film introduces a small but significant change. There is the same struggle to unscrew the detonator cap, but on screen, Sammy manages to do it himself, after which defining act of self-sufficiency, he nonchalantly throws the cap to the admiring Strang, and lies back to look at a sky filled with seagulls: somewhat crudely symbolic of his new freedom from doubt and uncertainty.[150]

It is curious but perhaps unsurprising that postwar British cinema did not feel confident in depicting Balchin's Sammy Rice: as a character, he is simply too close to the bone. Rather, Powell and Pressburger's film tries to have its cake and eat it too. While it *seems* to propose an alternative masculinity, and endorse a version of independent-minded, technocratic domestic citizenship, it ends up withdrawing into the security of a hero almost indistinguishable from the military ideal. The filmic Sammy confronts his demons, replacing

doubt and uncertainty with assertive, hegemonic masculinity. Yet, this agency is not enabled by his scientific prowess; rather, it emerges from his pseudo-military display of courage and the consequent reward of a uniform. As a result, Powell and Pressburger turn an exemplary civilian narrative into one of the cinema's earliest nostalgic reinvestments in the war as a man-making activity.

Sammy was a civilian conveniently turned into a soldier to meet the demands of postwar mythologisation: the little guy who triumphs in the meritocracy of the people's war. But since there is a limit to the number of one-legged alcoholic bomb-disposal experts the peacetime army can accommodate, this fantasy of psychic unification – or perhaps uniformification – cannot represent a long-term solution to the reconfiguration of postwar masculinity. Other plots must be sought, and the chapters that follow map the challenge of creating these stories in a culture haunted by the ghost of Sammy Rice and his all-consuming belief that the civilian can never quite be good enough. Chapter 1 focuses on the enabling potential of technology, mapping Hammond Innes's faith in the rehabilitative power of work, alongside his configuration of new antagonists, both mechanical and elemental. Innes is a progenitor of the 'demob thriller' in which isolated alienated heroes are regenerated through skill and risk; in *Air Bridge* (1950), they also find new purpose in emergent cold-war tensions. The chapter then turns to Nevil Shute's *No Highway* (1948), which, while equally preoccupied with the man-making properties of technology, takes a very different approach to the imagination of risk. The novel concerns the safety and economic viability of British civil aviation and makes an unlikely hero out of a 'boffin' working on metal fatigue. Shute is also interested in organisations, and *No Highway* anticipates a reconfiguration of the national within the corporate and familial that will be integral to Chapter 2. Focused primarily on the cinema, this chapter maps the repurposing of aviation for peacetime narrative. Starkly contrasting manifestations of the test pilot appear in David Lean's *The Sound Barrier* (1952) and Charles Crichton's *The Man in the Sky* (1957), while Basil Dearden's *Out of the Clouds*

(1955) makes a fetish out of London Airport. All these films debate the relationship between risk and safety in ideals of domestic heroism, and they all invest in machines that threaten to overwhelm mere human actors. These narratives present an ambivalent embrace of modernity, and the disquiet that runs through them is indicative of a deep-rooted anxiety surrounding the dangers of scientific discovery: the fear that technological man-making might just as easily produce monsters as men. Chapter 3 addresses this concern, exploring the extent to which a long-established British distrust of intellectuals was exacerbated by nuclear science and cold-war tensions. Fictional scientists walked a tightrope between a desirable, hard-edged empiricism – ideal for the reconstitution of national masculinity – and an ungraspable theoretical unworldliness liable to render them naïve and treacherous. The disturbingly prescient satire of John Wyndham's *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) offers one, far from reassuring, response to fears of incomprehensible technology. It also effectively undermines the man-making powers of science, as does the final case study of this section, Nigel Balchin's *A Sort of Traitors* (1949). Like *The Small Back Room* before it, *A Sort of Traitors* introduces a ghost. In this case, it is Ivor Gates, the novel's hyperbolic disabled villain, whose refusal of conventional rehabilitation will resonate throughout Part II.

Turning to disability, Chapter 4 examines a series of war memoirs detailing the reconstitution of masculine subjectivity in the face of life-changing injury. Its central focus is the autobiographical project of RAF veteran William Simpson, who suffered traumatic burn injuries when shot down in France in 1940. Remarkably surviving his wounds and subsequent incarceration, Simpson wrote three differently inflected accounts of his experience that both embrace and resist the 'triumph over adversity' narrative common to disability autobiography. For Simpson, the act of writing becomes prosthetic, as his narrative enables new modes of self-constitution and observational agency. The rhetoric of rehabilitation is central to this chapter, as is the role of heteronormativity in reconstituting disabled subjectivity and achieving the 'goal' of domestic citizenship;

both these concerns return in Chapter 5, which examines what happens when fiction attempts to mediate the wounds of war. Disabled plotting was widespread in the period, and I return to the novels of Nevil Shute and Hammond Innes to explore its possibilities and limitations. Unsurprisingly, the damaged male body is obliged to symbolise a range of wartime losses, and to stand for the processes of civic and psychic rehabilitation; but the generic form of the thriller also proves a disruptor of these tropes, and Innes's *The Angry Mountain* (1950) revels in a representational excess that plays havoc with conventions of emotional restraint. The same cannot be said of Shute's engagement with male damage, and disturbingly evident in *Requiem for a Wren* (1955) is the displacement of male vulnerability onto suffering female bodies. The representation of women in Shute's novels is indicative of wider transitions in popular cultural plotting, which saw women transformed from plucky daughters, lovers and companionate partners into materialistic inhabitants of an emasculating domesticity who might, at best, form prosthetic supports for wounded men. The story of postwar man-making cannot be told without due attention to the narrative construction of women, and the shrinking horizons of femininity are traced across the writers and films I explore.

The final chapter turns to the mythologisation of Douglas Bader, whose bestselling biography *Reach for the Sky* (1954) became the box-office hit of 1956. The biography skilfully domesticates the abrasive egotistical Bader, turning him into a hero fit for the postwar world, and in the process, the book significantly revalorises the war. Unlike nearly all the narratives *Prosthetic Agency* considers, *Reach for the Sky* is not about recovering from war but rather about recovering *through* war; it is a story of war as therapy. The film adaptation preserves both domestication and therapy, while also democratising its hero, enabling Bader's exceptional story to mutate into a communal commemoration of wartime resilience. Bader was not, though, the only disabled celebrity to emerge from the conflict, and in the Coda, I turn to a group of burned airmen whose survival and treatment represented one of the most significant technological

innovations of the war. These 649 men were members of an exclusive organisation – the 'Guinea Pig' club – and their postwar rehabilitation is recorded in the pages of a magazine that forms my final instance of prosthetic agency. This book has been concerned throughout with ideals of domestic citizenship and heteronormativity; *The Guinea Pig* offers a vital counter-narrative of homosocial cultural repair.

The replotting of postwar masculinity required the acceptance of irreconcilable ideals and the willing embrace of contradiction. It also required literal and conceptual props through which anxieties and desires could be mediated. The power of technology, at least initially, seemed an ideal solution, presenting an accessible and gender-appropriate route to reinvigorated masculinity, and it is to this prosthetic agent that the book now turns.

[1] Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (1982), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, 123–24.

[2] Anthony Thorne, *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1943), London: The Right Book Club, 1945, 163.

[3] Henry Green, *Back* (1946), London: Harvill, 1998, 74.

[4] Ibid., 24, 84.

[5] Ibid., 187.

[6] Graham Dawson contends that the 'soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks' (*Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, 1). Unsurprisingly, given the potency of the warrior hero, the revulsion

from such narrative was temporary. The conflict returned to cinemas, and John Ramsden notes that between 1955 and 1960, British war films met with little critical approval but were consistently successful at the box office ('Refocusing "The People's War": British War Films of the 1950s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33:1, 1998, 42).

[7] The challenge of homecoming – its misrecognitions and dislocations – has a long literary history, persuasively explored by Kate McLoughlin's *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790–2015*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

[8] This is not to suggest that no war stories were told in this fifteen-year period but rather to acknowledge a qualitative difference in mediation. As will become evident, the war is a ubiquitous factor shaping the narratives of prosthetic agency, even as they seek to avoid it. However, as film historians have noted, the mid-1950s saw the emergence of a new Second World War cinema. In Christine Geraghty's account, the representative cross-class group of wartime cinema evolves into an elite selection under the command of an inspirational leader (*British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'*, London: Routledge, 2000, 187), while Robert Murphy observes that the 'reliance on memoirs written by articulate middle-class officers … and the removal of the necessity of showing everybody pulling together displaced the populism of wartime films' (*British Cinema and the Second World War*, London: Continuum, 2000, 205).

[9] The domestic was, as Alison Light and Sonya Rose have demonstrated, already a feature of pre-war and wartime constructions of national identity. In the aftermath of the conflict, however, the domestic became the cornerstone of culturally approved citizenship, underpinned by belief in a 'democratic

selfhood' resistant to aggressive tendencies and securely rooted in the family (Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 18). See also Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 153; and Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, London: Routledge, 1991.

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[10] Defining a 'bestseller' in the twentieth century is challenging. Clive Bloom notes the absence of reliable sales figures, the patchy quality of publishers' records and the uncertainties of pulp authorship, but he nonetheless offers a series of definitional features. Bestselling fiction is that which is 'most caught in its own age'. It is always 'commercially orientated' and prioritises narrative over style. A writer's success might be judged on a single fiction or through an established pattern of consistent high sales, and the most successful examples are marked by their translatability: their capacity to be re-energised through new mediums (*Bestsellers: Popular Fiction since 1900*, London: Palgrave, 2002, 15–21).

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[11] Allan Hepburn (ed.), *Around 1945: Literature, Citizenship, Rights*, Montreal: McGill–Queens University Press, 4.

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[12] Vivian Sobchack's essay 'A Leg to Stand On' responds to the proliferation of prosthetic metaphor in contemporary theoretical practice with a demand for more care in how the term is used. In her search for a more nuanced tropology, Sobchack parses the distinctions between metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, and in that spirit, I am preoccupied here with synecdochic prosthetic relations 'that posit the cooperation and connective union of body and prosthetic in world-directed tasks' (*Carnal Thoughts:*

Embodiment and Moving Image Culture, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 215). Yet, the prosthetic also makes literal appearances, a tangible component of bodies under discussion, and it functions in a wholly metaphorical sense – in particular, when I turn to writing as a mode of prosthetic agency for veteran autobiographers confronting expectations of wholeness they can no longer approximate. I am interested in the things that replaced lost agency and the idea – or trope – of replacement. The two are not easily divorced in a period in which so many were 'missing' the formative force of war.

[13] John Creasey (writing as J. J. Marric), *Gideon's Night* (1957), London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964, 11.

[14] Elaine Freedgood, *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 103.

[15] Ibid., 105, 109.

[16] Ibid., 112.

[17] Ibid., 121.

[18] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, London: Routledge, 1992, 53.

[19] For both men and women, the symbolic power of home, and, in particular, its capacity to offer 'freedom, peace and privacy', was 'enhanced' by the war (Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40:2, 2005,

343–44). This ideal and its imagined regenerative power will be explored in Chapter 1.

[20] Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 12.

[21] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity, 1995, 44.

[22] Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (1990), London: Routledge, 1992, 166.

[23] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 179.

[24] My observations on national identity are also indebted to Ernest Barker (ed.), *The Character of England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947; Robert Colls, *The Identity of England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; and Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. The relationship between Britishness and Englishness in this period is notoriously slippery, and 'England' was regularly used across the media to stand for the whole of the United Kingdom, an amalgamation that generated considerable resentment in Wales and Scotland (Rose, *Which People's War?* 218).

[25] Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939–1945*, London: Macmillan, 1995, 2.

[26] Connell, *Masculinities*, 11. Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin reiterates the point: 'Masculinity is a "becoming," a process as opposed to a perceived feminine "being" or state. Like "progress"

within patriarchy, it is something to be achieved and to be experienced as a triumph over nature' ('The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity', in *Theorising Masculinities*, eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, London: Sage, 1994, 241).

[27] Alexander Baron, *From the City, From the Plough* (1948), London: Black Spring Press, 2010, 97.

[28] Rose, *Which People's War?* 128. See also Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 78–83.

[29] In Light's piquant phrase: 'Since war, whatever its horrors, is manly, there is something both lower-class and effeminate about peacetime' (*Forever England*, 7).

[30] Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914–1994*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2000, 328; Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Representation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, 87. Shephard's comprehensive study of the relationship between soldiers and psychiatrists opens with the somewhat ironic observation that the evidence suggests 'a job and a relationship matter more than any psychiatric treatment' (*War of Nerves*, xxiii).

[31] Allport, *Demobbed*, 155–58.

[32] W. E. Johns, *Gimlet Comes Home*, London: University of London Press, 1946, 8–9; Nicholas Monsarrat, 'Licensed to Kill', in *The Ship That Died of Shame and Other Stories* (1959), Looe: House of Stratus, 2013, 235.

[33] The importance of activity as a mode of agency for incarcerated men is stressed by Adrian Gilbert, *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe, 1939–1945*, London: John Murray, 2006, 266. See also Gill Plain, 'Before the Colditz Myth: Telling POW Stories in Postwar British Culture', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 7:3, 2014, 269–82.

[34] Nevil Shute, *Round the Bend* (1951), London: Vintage, 2009, 226, 231. The novel sets up a disturbing opposition between male purpose and female domesticity. Connie, the teacher, would be betraying his worshippers if he abandoned them for the comforts of wife and home, and the same applies to his doubting Thomas, Tom Cutter, whose desire must take second place both to Connie's vision and the matter of 'seeing things through' (285).

[35] Shapira, *The War Inside*, 18.

[36] Ibid., 19. Psychoanalytic conceptions of 'domestic citizenship' were widely disseminated and popularised through BBC broadcasts, particularly those featuring Donald Winnicott (Ibid., 112–13).

[37] John Lodwick's novel renders fears about what returning soldiers might bring home hyperbolically literal, when a sergeant's commanding officer suggests he choose a selection of explosives with which to 'amuse [his] children during the long winter evenings' (*Peal of Ordnance*, London: Methuen, 1947, 11).

[38] Agatha Christie, *Taken at the Flood* (1948), London: Fontana, 1961, 184.

[39] Nevil Shute, *The Chequerboard* (1947), London: Vintage, 2009, 325–26.

[40] Ibid., 326.

[41] Ibid., 326–27.

[42] Monsarrat, 'Licensed', 187.

[43] Ibid., 206. The story repeatedly stresses that the captain has taught the private soldier to be a killer, and for all that Murderer is depicted as a debased and ultimately insane figure, the story invites sympathy for an apt pupil who finds his learning not only surplus to requirements but actively repugnant: 'He suddenly seemed to become first-class at everything connected with individual killing, from the judo-chop to the throat to the hole in the back of the head; he also brought to the job an overtone of sadistic joy which was funny at the time, though disgusting thereafter' (Ibid., 195).

[44] Ibid., 208, 216.

[45] Ibid., 237.

[46] Ibid., 235.

[47] Examples include emasculation (*The Small Voice*, dir. Fergus McDonell, 1948), post-traumatic psychosis (Nigel Balchin, *Mine Own Executioner*, 1945), evil (Ian Fleming, *Moonraker*, 1955), and quasi-religious sacrifice (Nevil Shute, *A Town Like Alice* 1950). The

symbolic uses of disability have been comprehensively catalogued by critics including Martin Norden (1994), Lennard Davis (1995), Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997), David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000) and Ato Quayson (2007), and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

[48] Shephard, *War of Nerves*, 320–21; Marina MacKay, *Ian Watt: The Novel and the Wartime Critic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 43–45.

[49] As Lennard Davis persuasively argues, the portrayal of people with disabilities as 'noble', 'heroic' and 'special' is as damaging as more obviously demeaning stereotypes or strategies of marginalisation (*Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, London: Verso, 1995, 106).

[50] Anthony Irwin, *Infantry Officer* (1943), in Paul Richey, Ludovic Kennedy and Anthony Irwin, *Youth at War: Comprising 'Fighter Pilot', 'Sub-Lieutenant' and 'Infantry Officer'*, London: Batsford, 1944, 161.

[51] Light, *Forever England*, 8. For public cultures of mourning in the aftermath of the First World War, see David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain', in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley, London: Europa, 1981; for distraction, see Light, *Forever England*; for the growth of pacifism, see Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of Faith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; for the medical profession, see Shapira, *The War Inside*, 32, and Shephard, *A War of Nerves*.

[52] Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular*

Culture, *1850–2000*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000, 153–54.

[53] 'Sapper' (Herman McNeile), *Bulldog Drummond* (1920), London: Hodder, 2007, 15.

[54] James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History*, 30:1, 1999, 203–15.

[55] Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), London: Faber and Faber, 1992, 15.

[56] Leonard Cheshire, *Bomber Pilot* (1943), London: Arrow Books, nd, 42.

[57] Rose, *Which People's War?* 195.

[58] These reviews and all quotations are taken from the compendium reprint, Richey, Kennedy and Irwin, *Youth at War*.

[59] Ibid., 176.

[60] Ibid., 190, 192, 202, 42. Irwin's readership would, most likely, not have been averse to this more aggressive tone. Mollie Panter-Downes's *London War Notes* (1971), which chart British public opinion across the conflict, make repeated reference to civilian desires for a more active prosecution of the war (London: Persephone, 2014, 137, 191).

[61] Richey, Kennedy and Irwin, *Youth at War*, x.

[62] Anderson describes Ernest Bevin's efforts, as Minister of Labour, to institute parity of rehabilitation services for civilians and military personnel, not least because of the wartime increase in factory accidents. A limited number of industrial rehabilitation centres opened, but the bulk of the work – including the rehabilitation of miners – remained the responsibility of industry (*War, Disability and Rehabilitation*, 90).

[63] See Langhamer's 'The Meanings of Home', which explores Mass Observations directives, *Picture Post* articles, political debates and the 1946 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition (343–47); see also David Kynaston *Austerity Britain: 1945–51*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, and *Family Britain: 1951–57*, London: Bloomsbury, 2009.

[64] McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics*, 268.

[65] Shapira, *The War Inside*, 18.

[66] For commandos, see Betty Miller, *On the Side of the Angels* (1945); Elizabeth Taylor, *A Wreath of Roses* (1949); and Victoria Stewart, '"Commando Consciousness" and Criminality in post–Second World War Fiction', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 10:2, 2017, 165–77; the rapid degeneration of the pilot is discussed in Chapter 2. Civilian fears that returning soldiers would be somehow contaminated are encapsulated by the melodrama *Silent Dust* (1949). Here, the failure of trust is made painfully evident in a sequence where a rogue soldier tells in voiceover a sympathetic bad luck story, while the screen depicts the same events as a very different tale of violence, duplicity and debauchery. The other side of a perceived wartime betrayal is evident in Nicholas Monsarrat's *The Cruel Sea* (1951), which offers venomous depictions of, among other things, shirking workmen,

complacent shore officers, men in reserved occupations, deceptive women and the Irish.

[67] Nevil Shute, *Requiem for a Wren* (1955), London: Vintage, 2009, 185. The sentiment is anticipated in Nigel Balchin's *Sundry Creditors* (1953): 'What you want is another nice war. … No man who's really *fought* in a war is much good after. Except to fight in another. The thing has possibilities, good and bad, that make ordinary life dull' (London: The Reprint Society, 1954, 118).

[68] Examples range from the relatively 'pure' documentary ethos of Humphrey Jennings's *Fires Were Started* (1943), which cast real firemen as its protagonists, to Ealing Studios' *The Foreman Went to France* (1942), a feature film in which three men – a Welshman, a Scotsman and a cockney – and an American woman combine to rescue a vital machine from France. Group heroes could be female and/or civilian and were found inhabiting factories (*Millions Like Us*, 1943), villages (*Went the Day Well?* 1943), the Merchant Navy (*San Demetrio London*, 1943), the Army (*The Way Ahead*, 1944) and pretty much any wartime context that the Ministry of Information felt needed a morale boost or warning against complacency. See Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (1986), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994; and Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War*. Group heroes were also used to structure novels. See, for example, C. S. Forester, *The Ship* (1943), Pamela Hansford Johnson, *Winter Quarters* (1944) and Baron, *From the City, From the Plough* (1948).

[69] Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 32.

[70] Ibid., 51–53.

[71] Ibid., 62.

[72] Jeremy Crang, *The British Army and the People's War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, 59.

[73] Ibid., 140.

[74] Ibid., 70, 141. Francis describes the NCO–officer distinction as 'the most corrosive legacy of both the pre-war RAF and the British class system more generally' (*The Flyer*, 51). Its status as an unexamined norm is evident in a small but telling detail from Paul Ritchie's *Fighter Pilot* (1941). A photograph captioned 'Members of 73 Squadron' identifies the three officers but leaves the single sergeant pilot unnamed.

[75] The precarity of wartime change is highlighted by Ross McKibbin, who asks why 'those who had authority in 1918 still had it, more or less, in 1951, despite the fact that the Second World War significantly recast social relationships?' (*Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, v).

[76] From humble origins, this mutable man (and it is a class, in this period, reserved for masculinity) may have been to a grammar school and a provincial university, or may have worked up from an apprenticeship, to achieve an authoritative position within the new corporate cultures of work. Shute's Tom Cutter, narrator-protagonist of *Round the Bend* (1951), is a typical example: a working-class man who has acquired his own business through

understanding the machines essential to modernity, he is comfortable – and accepted – in any context that involves the discussion of aviation and/or business. John Hill suggests this 'technical intelligentsia' was perceived as increasingly important, and wooed by both left and right (*Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*, London: Palgrave/BFI, 1986, 6–7).

[77] As, for example, in *Rosie Hogarth* (1951), Alexander Baron's account of the disorientating homecoming of an East End orphan.

[78] Andrew Spicer cites Sid Field, Norman Wisdom and Charlie Drake as exemplary working-class fools, while the rogue most often took the form of the 'comic spiv'. His exemplar of 'stoical ordinariness' is Jack Warner, whose career as a solid, reliable paterfamilias started with his role as Corporal Horsfall in *The Captive Heart* (*Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 102, 113, 82–86).

[79] Lodwick, *Peal*, 7.

[80] Ibid., 156.

[81] This fictional communality was far from universal. Baron's bestseller *From the City, From the Plough* (1948), which maps a battalion's participation in the Normandy landings, lays bare the tensions dividing officers, NCOs and privates, and the difficulty, even with good will, of cross-class communication.

[82] Alice Ferrebe, *Literature of the 1950s: Good, Brave Causes*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 6. Ferrebe also notes the arrival of television as a key determinant of cultural change

and a force that, with the arrival of ITV in 1954, ushered commercialism 'into a space crucial to the ideology of Britain's project of reconstruction: the home' (8). See also Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 670–71.

[83] Sue Harper and Vincent Porter contrast the most popular film of 1950, *The Blue Lamp*, with that of 1961, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The first sees disaffected youth as a threat to society that must be contained within traditional structures of authority; the second affords narrative centrality to youth and its discontents (*British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 1).

[84] *Carry On Nurse* (1959) and *Carry On Constable* (1960) were even more successful (Ibid., 262–63).

[85] Ibid., 264.

[86] There is, of course, a long tradition of the working classes mothering their social superiors without ever attaining the authority of a paternal role. What distinguishes *Ice Cold in Alex* is the feminised, hysterical position of the officer, Captain Anson, and the fragility of his authority – a point emphasised in the casting of the diminutive John Mills against the monumental physical masculinities of Harry Andrews and Anthony Quayle.

[87] John Braine, *Room at the Top* (1957), London: Eyre Methuen, 1978, 134.

[88] Braine suggests class privilege is quite literally written on the body. Joe has learned to hide his teeth when he smiles, and his lover Alice's teeth reveal signs of decay that give them 'a kind of

shabby kinship'; by contrast, the wealthy Susan and her officer-class suitor Jack have perfect teeth (Ibid., 84, 44–45).

[89] Ibid., 153–54.

[90] Ibid., 162.

[91] The need for a uniform to stand for, or stand in for, male agency – especially in the years before D-Day – is highlighted in Crang's succinct observation that, with more than 1.5 million troops stationed in Britain, 'for most soldiers … the experience of war was not one of daring deeds at the "sharp end", but rather of a sedentary existence in camps or depots across the country polishing their brasses and wondering why they were there' (*The British Army*, 2).

[92] The story was filmed by the Ealing producer/director team Michael Relph and Basil Dearden in 1955.

[93] Monsarrat, 'The Ship That Died of Shame', in *The Ship*, 1.

[94] Ibid., 2. Randall's extreme competence at war perhaps contributes to his failure to adjust in the aftermath. Describing the exhilaration of action, he concludes 'I'd never felt so good before – or since' (11).

[95] Ibid., 18.

[96] Ibid., 29.

[97] Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 5.

[98] Ibid., 4.

[99] Francis, *The Flyer*, 124. Superstition's power should not be underestimated. Cheshire describes a wireless operator's distress at losing his mascot, a 'little fluffy black dog', shortly before take-off for Germany. Neither he nor his crew return from the mission (*Bomber Pilot*, 136).

[100] H. E. Bates, *Fair Stood the Wind for France* (1944), London: Penguin, 2005, 141.

[101] Susan Gubar, '"This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun": World War II and the Blitz on Women', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Higonnet et al., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, 229.

[102] Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 4.

[103] The film's depiction of an inarticulate Englishness founded on the stoic withholding of emotion is discussed more fully in Gill Plain, *John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 72–81.

[104] Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, 280.

[105] H. E. Bates, 'Introduction', in Paul Brickhill, *Escape – or Die: Authentic Stories of the R.A.F. Escaping Society* (1952), London:

Pan, 1954, 8.

[106] Susan Sontag, ‘Notes on “Camp”’, in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, 53–54. Or, conversely, as Christopher Isherwood observes in one of the earliest definitions of the mode, ‘you can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously’ (‘From the World in the Evening’, in Cleto, *Camp*, 51). I am grateful to Subha Mukherjee for this productive line of thought.

[107] Terence Rattigan, *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), London: Nick Hern Books, 1999, 51.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Shute, *Round the Bend*, 218.

[110] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (1957), London: Mandarin, 1990, 29. The novel also asserts the sustaining power of work in unbearable circumstances (8, 10, 53).

[111] William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 28–29. Watkin is exploring a concept proposed by Edward Shorter and developed by Elaine Showalter.

[112] My primary focus here is men, but these values were equally inculcated in a cadre of middle-class women. Light’s description of the interwar English as inward-looking and private, with an idiom ‘more about self-effacement and retreat than bombast and expansion’, applies to both genders (*Forever England*, 11). Women’s capacity to inhabit this masculine mode is illustrated by

Celia Johnson's captain's wife in *In Which We Serve* (1941). Her toast to her rival, the ship, evokes and then rejects archetypally feminine emotions such as jealousy, and keeps wartime anxieties at arm's length, while enacting the absolute patriotic commitment (and citizenship) of women.

[113] John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee*, London: Riverrun, 2017, 304, 361.

[114] Spicer, *Typical Men*, 161–63.

[115] Hammond Innes, *The Lonely Skier* (1947), London: Fontana, 1957, 18.

[116] Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (1983), 2nd ed., Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2008, 50.

[117] Ramsden, 'Refocusing', 39. Middlebrow writing has received new attention over the past twenty years, albeit largely concentrated on women writers and an audience perceived as female. A useful definition, applicable to male-centred plotting, is provided by Ina Habermann: 'The function of such narratives is neither "mere escapism" – whatever that may be – and light entertainment, nor intellectual challenge through aesthetic innovation, but an imaginative projection of lived experience conducive to a negotiation of identity and emotional 'entertainment' in the sense of providing sustenance' (*Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow: Priestley, du Maurier and the Symbolic Form of Englishness*, London: Palgrave, 2010, 35). See also Kate MacDonald (ed.), *The Masculine Middlebrow 1880–1950: What Mr Miniver Read*, London: Palgrave, 2011.

[118] Praseeda Gopinath's *Scarecrows of Chivalry: English Masculinities after Empire*, for example, places Ian Fleming alongside the more culturally valorised Orwell, Larkin and Waugh (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013). This is a welcome mixing of genres and brows, but there is no space for the popular writing whose neglect is mourned by Worpole and Ramsden.

[119] Paris, *Warrior Nation*, 223.

[120] Ibid., 224–25.

[121] Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939–49*, London: Routledge, 1989, 1; Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 212.

[122] Geraghty is one of many critics to record the British public's interwar preference for the Hollywood film product (*British Cinema in the Fifties*, 3). She also provides a succinct account of cinema-going from 1945 to 1960, noting generational shifts in attendance, transformations in the cinema as a 'social space' and the impact not just of television but of other new home-centred leisure activities such as DIY (1–20).

[123] Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 262. Melodrama in this context might be understood as a mode of generating and mediating emotions within a framework of conventional morality. Its importance in this period is discussed by Johanna Laitila, who argues, following Christine Gledhill, that the distinction between melodrama and realism cannot be sustained and that melodrama as a *mode* can permeate pretty much any other genre (*Melodrama, Self, and*

Nation in Postwar British Popular Film, London: Routledge, 2018, 16–20). See Carolyn Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, for the history of the genre, its capacity to engage social problems and its development into a mode permeating contemporary cultural forms.

[124] Williams, *English Melodrama*, 264.

[125] Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film*, London: BFI Publishing, 1994, is probably the first major study. See also Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*; Tony Williams, *Structures of Desire: British Cinema 1939–1955*, State University of New York Press, 2000.

[126] Both Murphy and Geraghty identify a range of popular genres, including thrillers, comedies, 'Commonwealth' films and, in the second half of the 1950s, the resurgent war movie. For the 'spiv cycle' of morally ambivalent crime films that encapsulated postwar disaffection, see Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*. For both realist and costume melodrama, and its function in the plotting of postwar rehabilitation, see Laitila, *Melodrama, Self, and Nation* and Geoff Mayer, *Roy Ward Baker*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

[127] Mayer, *Roy Ward Baker*, 4.

[128] Isabel Quigley, *The Spectator*, 30 June 1961, quoted in Mayer, *Roy Ward Baker*, 74.

[129] Ibid., 4. A notable exception to this neglect is Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism*. See the discussion of narrative and realism (53–65).

[130] The film that prompted Quigley's comments, Roy Baker's *The Singer Not the Song* (1961), does more than most to demonstrate the instability of classical film narrative. Designed as a conventional melodrama, it mutated into something quite other through a combination of miscasting, performative excess, expressionist framing and a plot involving the triangulation of male desire that could have been scripted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The actual screenwriter was Nigel Balchin, a figure who will be central to this study.

[131] Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 24–25.

[132] Ibid., 36.

[133] Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 1.

[134] Ibid., 2

[135] Ibid., 4.

[136] In Ramsden's words, the 1950s were 'the last period in which British cinema could claim an essentially national audience: overall annual ticket sales fell by a third between 1948 and 1958, but in 1959 there were still 14.5 million people a week in British cinemas', a figure he contextualises as exceeding the number of televisions in British homes and almost matching the circulation of national daily newspapers ('Refocusing', 36). By this point, however, film culture was fragmenting into specialised markets, and attendance had declined to the extent that the cinema could no longer be regarded as 'the quintessential modern form of

popular entertainment' (Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 20).

[137] At its crudest, through an insistence that criminality must be punished, no matter how extreme the mitigating circumstances (Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 60–61). Prison awaits Clem at the end of *They Made Me a Fugitive*, while *The Intruder* demands that Ginger complete his jail term, even though the viewer now understands the harshness of his treatment. And however enjoyable *The League of Gentlemen*'s (1960) perfectly constructed crime, their ultimate capture is obligatory.

[138] Bloom, *Bestsellers*, 36. The relationship was supplemented throughout by newspapers and, from the late 1950s, by television, which was recognised as a 'complementary medium' that could facilitate the longevity of popular novels (41–42).

[139] For example, the film *The Way to the Stars*, which had its roots in Terence Rattigan's play *Flare Path*, was novelised by Dilys Owen (Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, 296). Novels were also syndicated to the press, while magazines such as *Picturegoer* converted film narratives into picture stories. The importance of intermediality is flagged by Ferrebe, who discusses the contribution of film adaptation and book tie-ins to the success of Braine's *Room at the Top* and Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (*Literature of the 1950s*, 196–200).

[140] Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 10.

[141] Ibid., 11.

[142] Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*, 69.

[143] Derek Collett, *His Own Executioner: The Life of Nigel Balchin*, Bristol: Silverwood Books, 2015, 221. Innes films included *The White South* (*Hell Below Zero*, 1954) and *Campbell's Kingdom* (1957).

[144] Bloom, *Bestsellers*, 15.

[145] Bew, *Citizen Clem*, 21.

[146] Disability in Britain in the aftermath of the Second World War remains under-explored territory, not least because much of the field-defining work in disability studies has emerged from an American context. Yet, disability, like all determinants of identity, has a national dimension that complicates its construction and representation. I discuss this further in Chapter 4.

[147] Nigel Balchin, *The Small Back Room* (1943), London: Cassell, 2000, 7, 71.

[148] Ibid., 187–88.

[149] Ibid., 192.

[150] Balchin apparently approved this new happy ending. The film was critically well received but did not do good business at the box office. Director Michael Powell attributed this to its wartime setting, which failed to appeal to a still war-weary public (Collett, *His Own Executioner*, 217–21).

Part I

Technology

Chapter 1

Enabling Machines

Hammond Innes, Nevil Shute and Technologies of Rehabilitation

◈

As the remarkable rehabilitation of Sammy Rice suggests, the late 1940s and early 1950s are characterised by a representational crisis in which cinema and popular fiction struggled to reconceptualise the hero. In the case of *The Small Back Room*, the belated redeployment of military masculinity seems singularly ill-suited to the demands of 'peace', when the comforts, purpose and prestige of uniform are exactly what are missing from many men's lives. But there were other residual combat contexts and identities that seemed to offer more hope of adaptation, chief among them, flight. For writers and filmmakers seeking to re-empower their disorientated demobilised protagonists, the pilot's agency – his ability literally and metaphorically to rise above the deadening disappointments of the postwar – was immensely attractive. Poised on the brink of a new era of commercial aviation, flight set the potential for romance alongside a still clearly recognisable danger,

and the pilot himself represented an ideal means of combining traditional heroic qualities of skill and risk with a non-martial, even domestic, modernity. The pilot also offered the possibility of building on the power of an iconic figure, the Battle of Britain hero, who – as mythology would have it – embodied an older, more chivalric mode of combat, and was thus less compromised than his soldier compatriot by the barbaric residue of war. As with all myths, this one is partial and illusory: the wartime pilot was, Martin Francis notes in his study of British culture and the Air Force, as much psychopath as poet, an agent of destruction and an 'omnipotent' superman rising above the mere mass of mankind.[1] Nonetheless, these twin conceptions of the pilot suggest the potential for a new hybrid hero combining nostalgia and modernity – and the sheer number of narratives featuring flight-related protagonists indicates the appeal of and desire for such a hero – but the pilot as avatar of modernity is also a profoundly ambivalent figure, carrying with him a threat that exceeds the boundaries of the human. Technology, in the postwar, whether mediated through the pilot or through other scientist and engineer figures, is always simultaneously blessing and curse. It offers unparalleled man-making opportunities at the same time as it threatens the very annihilation of mankind.

The foundations of this ambivalence were laid long before 1945; indeed, they were present from the point at which the aeroplane's ability effortlessly to penetrate national boundaries, and, in so doing, deliver bombs far beyond the frontline of conflict, was recognised, and exploited by, the British government. As a number of critics have noted, for all the popular cultural celebration of the solo flyer, the 'strategic emphasis' of the interwar RAF was on bombers rather than fighters, 'ensuring that the RAF could not remain untouched by association with the more violent and morally ambiguous aspects of air power'.[2] Exactly what could, and could not, be achieved by the bomber was made abundantly clear in the years after 1939. From the Blitz to the area bombing of German cities, air power was revealed as both devastatingly destructive in human terms and strategically limited in military ones, a paradox recognised by the

effacement of Bomber Command from British heroic narratives of the conflict.[3] Yet, irrespective of the debate about the efficacy of mass bombing, the Second World War represented a radical escalation in cultural understandings of what the combination of aircraft and technology might mean, a process that reached its zenith in the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Equally significant in terms of technological ambivalence was the emergence, in the later war years, of the V1 and V2 rockets that brought a belated terror to London streets. These flying bombs, uncannily suggestive of pilotless planes, made manifest a concept already imagined by fictions such as Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome* (1941). Warner's dystopian vision concludes with the superman aviator superseded, made redundant by the arrival of a superior, fully technological, pilot-free alternative. It is a vision that gestures towards a transformation in the relationship between man and machine that would be concretised by both the technical advances of the jet age and the dawn of the atomic era. The pilot, symbol of modernity throughout the interwar years, is displaced by a technology so powerful that it threatens to reconceptualise human agency, and his 'heroism' – once dependent upon the conventional dominance of man over machine – is reconfigured into a cyborg symbiosis.[4]

This disturbing transition is captured by Roland Barthes in his delineation of the 'jet-man'. He might be the logical successor to the wartime pilot but he is also 'nearer to the robot than to the hero', a figure who can hardly be seen in human terms:[5]

> The pilot-hero was made unique by a whole mythology of speed as an experience, of space devoured, of intoxicating motion; the *jet-man* on the other hand, is defined by a coenaesthesis of motionlessness ('*at 2,000 km per hour, in level flight, no impression of speed at all*'), as if the extravagance of his vocation precisely consisted in *overtaking* motion, in going faster than speed. …

> No wonder if, carried to such a pitch, the myth of the aviator loses all humanism. The hero of classical speed could remain a 'gentleman', inasmuch as motion was for him an occasional exploit, for which courage alone was required: one went faster in bursts, like a daring amateur, not like a professional, one sought an 'intoxication', one came to motion equipped with an age-old moralizing which made perception keener and enabled one to express its philosophy. It is inasmuch as speed was an *adventure* that it linked the airman to a whole series of human roles.[6]

The belief that the jet age represented a fundamental transition in the relationship between man and machine is reinforced by the autobiography of the novelist Nevil Shute, published in 1954. Shute, who had learned to fly in the early 1920s and enjoyed a career working for the pioneer aviation companies de Havilland and Vickers, was an enthusiast for and advocate of what might be termed 'mechanical' adventure, and the man-making qualities of 'sports which put your life in danger from time to time'.[7] Chief among these were activities involving boats and aeroplanes:

> … for a fleeting period in the world's history I think that aeroplanes ran boats close for sheer enjoyment. For about thirty years there was a period when aeroplanes would fly when you wanted them to but there were still fresh things to be learned on every flight, a period when aeroplanes were small and easily built so that experiments were cheap and new designs could fly within six months of the first glimmer in the mind of the designer. That halcyon period started after the First World War when I was a young man; it died with the Second World War when aeroplanes had grown too costly and too complicated for individuals to build or even to operate.[8]

For Shute, the conclusion of the Second World War, and the vast technological advances consequent upon the conflict, brought an

end to an era of heroic individualism, a period in which man could clearly and categorically demonstrate his mastery over the machine.[9] This idealised vision of man and machine might seem at odds with Shute's fascinating accounts of the teamwork involved in the construction and development of new aircraft in the interwar period – he was, for example, a central figure within the Vickers team building the airship R100 – but the keynote of this collaboration is the sense of breaking new ground, of innovation on a budget and against the odds, in an environment of intense, purposeful homosociality. For Shute, the transition to the jet age, by contrast, is exactly as diagnosed by Barthes: economies of scale dwarf the individual, the machine achieves a complexity that exceeds singular comprehension, the daring amateur gives way to the affectless professional and the hero becomes motionless in space.[10] The dwindling of the human to a state of technological insignificance is symptomatic also of an emergent, post-atomic understanding of science as threat rather than saviour. Appropriately, it would be Shute who produced, in *On the Beach* (1957), one of the period's most devastating novels of nuclear apocalypse.

Given the ambivalence with which new technology was greeted, it is perhaps unsurprising that in the world of the postwar thriller, old technology thrived. For all the elegiac tone of Shute's memoirs, plenty of opportunities remained for man and machine to struggle – together or in opposition – to overcome whatever odds might be stacked against them. Perhaps the pre-eminent popular writer of this struggle was Ralph Hammond Innes. In a publishing career spanning nearly six decades (his first novel was published in 1937, his last in 1996), Innes would produce some thirty bestselling novels of rugged male adventure. Habitually structured as thrillers on a David and Goliath principle, they feature a more or less disempowered male agent – frequently a veteran bearing physical, psychological or social wounds – fighting, and ultimately overcoming, a powerful adversary.[11] This adversary would often be an abstract, distanced corporate body or organisation, metonymically represented and given physical threat through a potent male bully. Success for the

hero would thus be dependent upon both brains and brawn, and the type of brains involved would be mechanical. After a few early experiments with journalists and lawyers, the archetypal Hammond Innes hero emerged as an engineer. The engines might be attached to aeroplanes or boats, or they might only be at the design stage, but the hero – whether pilot, mining engineer, film technician or machine tool salesman – will recognise their value and respond to their need. Similarly, the hero, often encountered mid-crisis, will himself be rescued and redeemed by his competence. Too useful to kill, he is put to work and through this finds the agency and resource to fight back. As the battered, traumatised, fugitive protagonist of *Air Bridge* observes: 'The hours I had spent working at that lathe had given me a new sense of confidence in myself' – confidence he will need if he is to overcome the novel's mesmeric, and aptly named, antagonist Bill Saeton.[12] These books, like most thrillers, are fundamentally homosocial in construction, negotiating the attractions of male power and offering intense depictions of the relationships that bind and divide men. Women nonetheless make regular appearances, but their function is seldom erotic: opportunities for romance are limited in breathless narratives of pursuit and jeopardy, and it is more often 'things' than people that generate emotional connections in the plots. Women, then, appear as helpmeets and safe harbours: largely practical, often plucky, occasionally maternal and frequently symbolic. Of all the available feminine archetypes, the preferred Innes option is the dutiful daughter, and as will become evident, this figure plays a vital role in the restoration of damaged masculinity and the rehabilitation of a discredited patriarchy.

Engineering the Future: Hammond Innes and Men at Work

Hammond Innes will be a recurring figure in this study. His work spans the postwar period and, in many respects, provides a test

case for the rise and fall of damaged demobilised masculinity as a dominant heroic form.[13] Yet, his early war novels also provide an effective demonstration of the formula's emergence.[14] *The Trojan Horse* (1940), for example, is both recognisably Innes and distinctly other. The book features several of the tropes that would come to characterise his fiction: there is conspiracy, there are engines and there is a significant father–daughter relationship humanising the remorseless clash of national, ideological and economic interests. The novel's fifth-column murder plot, however, locates it firmly in the context of the war and its ideological pressures. Notably, the imperilled Jewish refugee engineer Franz Schmidt and his daughter Freya are saved from certain death not through the actions of a beleaguered individual but through the intervention of a calm, rational, well-connected barrister, along with his family, his friends, the press and a willing band of the warm-hearted Wapping working class. Andrew Kilmartin goes it alone, but he does so from a position of relative authority and is able to draw on considerable resources to rescue the refugees and preserve their valuable diesel engine for the British war effort. Such collaboration and the security it engenders – typical of film propaganda during the war years – would rapidly disappear from the increasingly claustrophobic and paranoid confines of Innes's postwar work.[15]

A second staging post in the emergence of the archetypal demobilised hero can be found six years later in *Dead and Alive* (1946).[16] The postwar transition is already making its mark on characterisation: the returning veteran, David Cunningham, seeks the consolations of a lost pre-war world but finds himself 'a foreigner in [his] own country'.[17] Home disappoints, the prospect of domesticity crushes, but redemption is at hand through what will become another hallmark of Innes's man-making: ships and the sea. Cunningham finds a community of the demobilised and disenchanted, a space within the compact pseudo-military confines of a wrecked boat's wheelhouse and the healing power of work. Refitting the ship, he refits himself for postwar life and finds a means

to satisfy his need for purpose. Later in the novel, temporarily alone in the alien surroundings of Rome, he pauses to reflect on this transformation and the restorative power of homosociality: 'For three months now I had been married to a ship. For three months I had been fully occupied, mentally and physically. I had been living with men who were alive and interested in doing a job.'[18] Given that Cunningham had returned from war engaged to be married, this represents a categorical rejection of conventional domesticity, and the ship's departure for Italy is an adventure that provides the reinvigorations of risk, while also displacing postwar disenchantment onto the corrupt remains of Europe. Reaching Naples – 'the same bomb-raddled, mean-streeted tart that I had known over a year ago' – Cunningham also stumbles onto an actual damsel in distress, and in rescuing the displaced child woman Monica, he finds a dependent female figure who can provide a legitimising heterosexuality without compromising the homosocial bond.[19]

Dead and Alive, as the title suggests, is a halfway house: an early negotiation of disenchantment and the search for man-making strategies. David Cunningham is not rejected by postwar society, he rejects it – in the form of his stifling fiancée and her smug, insensitive family – and he has sufficient residual wartime and pre-war connections to enable the reconstruction of his life. Jim Pryce, the hapless hero of *The Killer Mine* (1947), is not so fortunate. *The Killer Mine* in many ways represents the coming to maturity of the Innes demobilisation template. The hero, a deserter who has spent two years working in Italian lignite mines to earn his passage home, is robbed, beaten and dumped on a Cornish beach with only five pounds to his name. Friendless, bitter and betrayed, he finds himself incarcerated in a gothic plot, surrounded by mad patriarchs, powerful villains, captive women, buried 'treasure', smugglers, the ghost of his mother and a surfeit of pathetic fallacy. Things look bad for him, but redemption, as ever, comes through work. Pryce is a mining engineer, and the smugglers need him: faced with technical problems to solve, he regains his self-respect and with it his capacity for agency, including the rescue of the captive woman. In spite of

this, Jim has been pushed so far beyond the bounds of social legibility that the plot cannot resolve his outlaw status: he remains a fugitive. Given this failure of social reintegration, the book nonetheless concludes hopefully, as the hero sails into exile, with a loyal helpmeet by his side. It's a long way from the reward and recognition that concludes *The Trojan Horse*, and it was also slightly too much for some reviewers. *The Killer Mine* came hot on the heels of Innes's breakout success, *The Lonely Skier* (1947), and critical consensus agreed with the judgement of the *Oxford Mail*: 'I prefer Mr Innes on skis to Mr Innes in a tin-miner's helmet. In this thriller he piles on the agony a bit too steeply.'[20]

As is evident from these examples, the rescue of a captive woman is a frequent feature of the Innes narrative. However, this figure is more complex than she might initially appear. In the first instance, these women are often resourceful and resilient, and the nature of their captivity may be psychological rather than physical; much like Innes's demobilised men, they are held prisoner by the past. Indeed, there are a number of female veterans among the women: they are pragmatic, skilled, adaptable and, in some remarkable cases, technically gifted.[21] The sheer competence of these women enables them to perform their symbolic duties within the narrative, prime among which is the protection of a father figure or his legacy. In this formulation, Innes produces a significant number of 'daughter cadets'. The daughter cadet adapts a term coined by Raymond Durgnat in his influential survey of British cinema, *A Mirror for England* (1970), and later developed by Andrew Spicer's *Typical Men* (2000). If, as Durgnat and Spicer suggest, cadet masculinity is the legitimate form for youthful heroic identification, the daughter cadet offers an alternative in the exceptional times of the postwar. Given that many male cadets will be absent, killed by war or – arguably more disturbingly – damaged by the conflict and mutated into the 'cad', Durgnat's antithesis of the cadet, the daughter has the potential to acquire a new significance.[22]

In examples considered in Chapter 2, the daughter cadet emerges as a conventional figure. In David Lean's 1952 film *The Sound Barrier*, Sue Garthwaite, daughter of the great aircraft designer John 'J. R.' Ridgefield, replaces both her dead brother and her dead husband, who had himself become a surrogate son to the designer-patriarch. Sue's cadetship is moral and biological: she counsels against excess risk and provides a new inheritor grandson. Innes's daughter cadets, by contrast, can be more radical, acting not just as conduits for male value but as actual inheritors. In the absence of the father, then, the ideal Innes woman fights determinedly for his rights and reputation: she is, above all other qualities, loyal. This combination of 'masculine' competence and 'feminine' devotion distinguishes the virtuous woman from her more problematic postwar other, the 'hard, experienced-looking' woman, with too much lipstick and colourful clothes, who has been divorced from conventional domesticity and rendered *unheimlich* by war.[23] Whatever the heroine has been through (and Innes's persistent use of a first-person male narrator ensures we have little insight into this), she will have qualities of homeliness and nurturance that enable her to care for the damaged protagonist. The agency of the Innes woman, then, is never personal but always in the service of a male other, and her inevitable plot trajectory is towards the security of the heteronormative bond: the transition from good daughter to good wife.[24] In these configurations, Innes's women are typical of the late 1940s 'loyal helpmeet' seen in films such as *The October Man* (1947).[25] More unusually for the thriller genre, though, they largely stay this way throughout the postwar period. While the cinema witnessed an evolution from helpmeet to femme fatale, or at least to an antagonistic materialist femininity that – however desirable – would only create problems for the beleaguered hero, Innes remained an advocate of the companionate nurturing marriage. Crucially, the dynamic of this muted heteronormative plot is one that does not interfere with the far more important business

of negotiating, and combating, the postwar corruption of the homosocial ideal.[26]

All these strands come together in *Air Bridge* (1951), a novel of the Berlin airlift. There are aeroplanes, engineers and a valuable engine in need of rescue. There is a daughter seeking to preserve her father's legacy, and there is fugitive masculinity: the hero bursts into the narrative pursued by the police and by the demons of his own wartime past. Beyond this, however, the novel is remarkable for its extreme veneration of the power of the machine, and for its pursuit of a more explicit political agenda. In *Air Bridge*, not only does the engine enable positive masculine rehabilitation, it also offers a disturbing indication of the machine's potential to overpower man. Furthermore, in the novel's battle for possession of the engine, a struggle which will implicate Britain, America and Germany, *Air Bridge* concerns itself with the need for a reconstitution of national priorities. Britain, as well as the hero, must learn to forget the past and make the necessary transition from old war to cold war. Germany is no longer the enemy, and new purpose, both personal and national, can be found in a Western alliance against the Soviet threat.

Air Bridge is structured around three locations: an abandoned military airfield in Wiltshire, the airlift flight corridor above Berlin and the Russian zone surrounding the city. Some contemporary critics questioned the time the novel spends in the desolate environs of the Membury flight hanger, setting up the ultimate adventure of stealing an aeroplane from the airlift, but it is in this opening section that the values – and the pathologies – driving the narrative are established, and which will be the main focus of my discussion. In the first section of the novel, we meet the very literal motor of the plot, the 'Satan Mark II' engine. This is no ordinary engine. Of revolutionary design that will cut fuel consumption by half, it has been looted from Germany, and the prototype now sits in a corner like some semi-sentient mechanical deity watching over the construction of its necessary other. When both engines are complete, they will be fitted to a waiting aircraft and taken to join the airlift, where their superior

capacity will bring fame and fortune to Bill Saeton, the man who stole the design. Yet, the engine is so valuable, so freighted with signification, that it seems to distort perception and generate paranoia, in particular, driving its virtual namesake to madness and death. Saeton is a mesmeric figure whose obsession with the engine and, by extension, British domination of the global freight industry drives him to a monstrous destructiveness that evokes both *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein*.[27] He believes the engine to be the embodiment of postwar economic power, and his relationship with this potent machine becomes a perverse cyborg symbiosis, his desire for its prosthetic agency so powerful that he sees its components as part of his own flesh: 'I feel sometimes as though these were my organs and I was being slowly manufactured and pieced together' (52). As the book progresses, he becomes increasingly inhuman, shedding personal loyalties and ethical considerations in service of the machine and his own ambition (76, 87). As an ex-serviceman and, the book suggests, a somewhat outdated hyper-patriot, he is both fallen angel and perverted, misguided creator, and like Frankenstein, he will, ultimately, take his creation to the grave with him.

Claustrophobically confined with Saeton and his engine are two men and two women, negotiating complex relationships between each other and the machine. The symbolic power exerted by the engine is not consistent: it is seen and worshipped differently by its various followers.[28] Tubby, the most mechanically gifted of the characters, has a calm meditative relationship with the machine – perhaps because he is more fully in thrall to his wandering, war-hardened wife Diana (36). Diana, in turn, is in thrall to the dominant male Saeton. She is not the only woman to offer herself to the charismatic leader: this is also attempted by Else, a former Nazi engineer and daughter of the engine's designer, who lurks around the airfield disguised as a displaced person. She offers her body in exchange for recognition of her father's achievement and, like Diana, is rejected; but Else's offer was purely strategic, and she interestingly remains Saeton's most potent adversary. Indeed, the

anthropomorphism utilised to signal Saeton's growing obsession is echoed in Else's figuration as midwife to the machine, her 'wide, intelligent eyes' seeming 'to soften' as they 'come to rest on the completed engine' (50). Later, she defends her right to its patent 'like a tigress defending her young' (113). The final figure in this pressure cooker of psychological problems and conflicted loyalties is Neil Fraser, the protagonist and first-person narrator. Fraser, in contrast to Saeton, Else and even Tubby, lacks agency, purpose and direction. On the run from the police after his role in a shady aeroplane smuggling exercise, and still haunted by traumatic wartime experiences as a POW, he voices a regular desire for comfort and mothering and is easily blackmailed into helping Saeton. The lonely, wounded Fraser has little interest in the engine per se: he desires the process, not the thing. He is a typical Innes hero who will be redeemed by the work of reconstruction, the drive, purpose and (self-)creative force of 'turning a piece of mechanism out of a lump of metal' (30, 33, 49). Nonetheless, the language of machine–human hybridity permeates his consciousness. Trying to articulate his inchoate desire for Else, he concludes he wants her less as a woman than as a rudder, a symbol of stability in an unreadable, disorientating postwar world: 'I wasn't in love with her. I told myself that a hundred times. But it made no difference. I needed a woman, someone to attach myself to. I was as rudderless as the wreck lying in the hanger' (119).

In their shambolic, fractured lives, deceits and desperate attachments, Fraser and Seaton represent the two dominant spectres of postwar masculinity: the much-feared residue of the conflict and its violence. Fraser, traumatised and dysfunctional, has proved unable to adjust to postwar life and has fallen into criminality; Saeton, meanwhile, appears as a literal embodiment of society's fear of the demobbed combatant, 'sprung like a phoenix from the flames of war' (56). He is the figure 'permanently reprogrammed' into a killer, who cannot abandon a war mentality, all too evident in his visceral hatred of Germany.[29] He is equally incapable of abandoning the habits of war: he will kill anyone who

gets in his way (123). Else, meanwhile, is probably Innes's most ambivalent manifestation of the daughter cadet. Trained as an engineer by her father, she has become the keeper of his memory, and the flame of German engineering. She admits to having been a member of the *Hitlerjugend*, a loyalty she only abjured after her father was killed, implicated in a conspiracy to remove Hitler. Her politics are entirely personal: her loyalty is to her father, not to an abstract concept of nation (or indeed to any ethical considerations beyond property law). In the absence of the man, she works for the nation he belonged to, irrespective of any wider political implications (93–96). Like Fraser, Else expresses a desire for the restorative power of work, but like Saeton, she is driven by a concept of service to *the* work. She, too, worships the engine and will do anything to reclaim it, and her fanaticism places her in ambivalent relationship to the conflicts being enacted between modes of masculinity and national need. Else, as a German woman, has a heavy signifying load to bear. She is a symbol of defeated nationhood more easily absorbed into the narrative for being a woman;[30] as a woman, she also functions as a legitimising heterosexual object of desire (both mother and lover) within a dangerously intense homosociality and, in her worship of the father and his work – usually an unqualified good in Innes's work – she cannot help but also become the fascist other, a source of fascination and a mirror to the pseudo-fascist fanaticism of Saeton.

The novel's ending is abrupt and ambivalent. After murdering Tubby, and attempting to kill Fraser, Saeton flees with his engines and takes a power dive into the sea. Fraser, by way of epitaph, observes: 'There had been something approaching greatness in him. He was a man who had seen a vision' (287). In the short concluding space, however, it is national interests that come to the surface. Fraser and Else will reconstruct the engines for an Anglo-American alliance:

> Somehow that seemed to make sense – if we reproduced those engines for the West, then perhaps Saeton and Tubby would not

> have died for nothing. As soon as I had made the decision the tenseness inside me seemed to ease and I was relaxed for the first time in days. Else was smiling. She was happy. And despite the pain in my shoulder I think I was happy too.
>
> (288)

Quite whether or why Fraser is happy is hard to determine. For the first time in the novel, he is freed from pursuit, brought back into a state of social legibility and liberated from a condition of chronic disorientation. But his relationship with Else has barely been sketched beyond a condition of mutual need, and it is not clear whether he welcomes the new deal because of his desire for her or because it offers once more the opportunity for reconstitutive work. He is being offered the recreation of the purposeful work environment, with added heterosexual legitimacy, but without the comforts of the homosocial bond. The ambivalence of the novel's ending is also indicated by changes made for its serialisation in a range of British regional newspapers (and the American *Saturday Evening Post*). The abridged syndicated version is marked by a notable difference: Tubby is saved from Seaton's murderous attack and makes it back from the Russian zone alive.[31] This 'happier' ending offers an even more explicit reconstruction of the novel's original engineering triumvirate, with Neil and Tubby free to reconstruct their ideal homosocial work environment and Else, the other fanatic, representing a more controllable and safer version of Saeton.

Although largely greeted with Innes's customary good reviews – praised for authenticity, atmosphere and thrills – aspects of *Air Bridge* nonetheless disturbed some critics. The *Times Literary Supplement* put the case trenchantly: 'it would have been better if it contained one sympathetic character. The Narrator has been selling British aircraft to the Stern Gang, the heroine is an unrepentant Hitler-maiden, the hero-villain wades through the blood of his friends to make a fortune out of an invention he has stolen from the

Nazis'.[32] Put like this, the future looks disturbing. With Saeton and his reactionary patriotism purged from the body politic, Neil, Else and their little Nazi engines are free to live happily ever after in a compromised postwar all too willing to forget the past. In this particularly brutal example of Innes's man-making, the reader might justifiably be worried by the speed with which Cold War imperatives overwrite the ethical considerations of reconstruction, civil society and international law. Yet, this rapid re-affiliation also speaks to a psychological void: so desperate is the need for purpose and direction that the Cold War comes as welcome relief. Any war, no matter how nebulous, ill-defined and compromised its allegiances, is better than no war at all.

This was not the view of Innes's contemporary Nevil Shute, although technical obsessions and aeroplane parts are equally central to his adventure romance *No Highway* (1948). Here, the machines speak to a very different set of postwar preoccupations, and the novel suggests a rather different set of answers to the man-making conundrum posed by the absence of conflict. Indeed, in *No Highway*, the demands of peace are every bit as complex – and almost as risky – as the business of war.

Safeguarding the Future: Nevil Shute and the Heroism of Little Men

> '… The little man was in a mighty tough spot. Nobody believed him.'
>
> 'That's what I mean,' I said. 'He's an inside man. If he'd been an athletic type six foot two in height and weighing fourteen stone, with a red face and fist like a ham, they'd have believed him all right, and he wouldn't have had to crash the aeroplane.'[33]

In the original version of *The Small Back Room*, the distinction between scientific theory and practical agency is an almost unbridgeable gulf. Science and soldiering demand different types of men, and their differences are exacerbated by a debased management caste that pays insufficient heed either to technical truths or practical experience. Nevil Shute's *No Highway* (1948) explores a similar set of tensions and conflicting interests, only now the stakes are those of peace not war: the safety, and economic viability, of British civil aviation. In the words of Shute's prefatory 'author's note': 'The scrupulous and painstaking investigation of accidents is the key to all safety in the air, and demands the services of men of the very highest quality.' The men who keep air passengers safe will be new heroes for the postwar age, but their heroism will be unsung and largely invisible, their achievements registered on a negative scale. Not unlike the spy, their purpose is to avert disaster, working behind the scenes to maintain a functional equilibrium. The qualities it takes to make these invisible men, and the likelihood of their recognition by a hidebound and uncomprehending establishment, are integral to Shute's plot. Yet ultimately, *No Highway* is far more optimistic than Balchin's *Small Back Room*, an optimism largely achieved by changing the quality of bureaucratic mediation. This is a book in which men 'of the very highest quality' enter management and succeed in making their voices heard, but behind this successful postwar repurposing lies a more ambivalent vision. *No Highway* is forward-looking in its attempt to imagine the science of the future but deeply reactionary in its belief that this future will be built upon separate gendered spheres: to succeed, its heroes must achieve the domestic competence of marriage alongside scientific validation. In Shute's postwar vision, then, the prosthesis upon which male agency depends is as much domestic as technological.

No Highway is narrated by Dr Dennis Scott, a comparatively young and happily married man recently appointed to a senior position at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough. Unlike many of Shute's narrators, Scott's function is not solely to frame the

story of another: his actions will be integral to the plot and he will emerge as the ideal of modern techno-bureaucratic heroism. However, Scott also has a self-conscious narrative function, and the tale he tells is that of the unworldly research scientist Mr Theodore Honey, a man destined to be both an unlikely romantic object and an unexpected heroic agent. Honey is a 'boffin' and a widower who, since his wife's wartime death, has become increasingly shabby and eccentric. He has a twelve-year-old daughter, for whom he cares deeply, but he has little idea of how to look after her, or himself. As Scott's initial description indicates, he is the antithesis of conventional heroic masculinity:

> He was a smaller man than I am, with black hair turning grey; he was dressed in a very shabby suit that had been cheap to start with. He always looked a bit dirty and down at heels, and his appearance did not help him, because he was one of the ugliest men I have ever met. He had a sallow face with the features of a frog, and a rather tired and discontented frog at that. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles with very thick glasses, and he was blind as a bat without them.[34]

Shute pulls no punches in his description of Honey's physical inadequacies. Repeatedly designated a 'little' man (39, 68, 72, 77, 80, 83, 150, 151, 208, etc.), his unprepossessing appearance is consolidated by a tendency to become flustered and inarticulate when confronted by dominant masculine types, be they bluff, confident members of the establishment or brash, young, egotistical pilots. He also has a series of eccentric intellectual hobbies, from the investigation of psychic phenomena to calculating the end of the world by pyramidology. Yet, Honey's scientific work is exemplary: lucid, rational and scrupulous. Reading his pre-war work on rocket propulsion, Scott concludes that it gives evidence not of Honey's madness but of Britain's wartime failure to make 'use of genius that lay under our hand' (133). This scientific lucidity is more than enough to convince Scott that Honey and his work should be taken

seriously. Unfortunately for both of them, Honey has ‘gone all nuclear’ (15), and all he has to show for his exemplary male knowledge is a sheaf of incomprehensible calculations. Authority, in the world of British aeronautical research, lies in the realm of empirical evidence, not abstract reasoning, and in consequence, no one will believe his theory that Britain’s premier passenger aircraft, the Rutland Reindeer, will fail due to metal fatigue after 1,440 hours’ flying.

Honey’s theorising is semi-supported by the loss of the prototype Reindeer, which has crashed in a remote corner of Labrador. The crash has been blamed on pilot error, but photographs at least suggest the possibility that the tail fell off. Honey is sent to investigate, only to discover that he is flying across the Atlantic in a Reindeer that has already flown 1,426 hours – almost exactly the estimated time to failure and double the time Scott has advised for the grounding of the aeroplane. Honey is thus transplanted from the abstract to the concrete: he is the only person who can avert a potential disaster. His attempt to persuade the captain to turn back ends in failure, as do his arguments for grounding the plane at its Gander pit stop. Dismissed as a ‘crank’, and categorised as hysterical, ‘he told his story badly, defeated before he started by the atmosphere of utter disbelief he sensed around him’ (102). Ironically, given Honey’s unassuming physicality, action is the only thing left to him. Unable to convince anyone to ground the plane, Honey does it himself, pulling up the undercarriage and belly-flopping the aircraft onto the tarmac, an action which will resonate throughout the book, not simply as a motor of plot but as a benchmark of ethical priorities. Scott accepts there was nothing else to be done, his wife – showing admirable disrespect for the dignity of the masculine world – laughs (127). Others are less forgiving. But the action permits a heroic symbiosis to take shape: Honey’s bravery enables Scott’s heroic stand, and the two men together encapsulate an attempt to reinscribe traditional masculine ideals in accordance with the demands of peace.

The book's male melodrama, then, is focused on credibility and leadership. Honey is not considered a plausible figure and Scott stakes his job, and his own credibility, on support for 'the little man'. In the process, Scott demonstrates all the features of a new mode of techno-bureaucratic heroism enacted around a boardroom table. He has moral courage and confidence in his own judgement; he is modest, unselfish and ethical. Surrounded by buck-passing equivocators, he takes responsibility for Honey and his actions: 'You can't go through life sitting on the fence. You've got to make decisions, and sometimes you're pretty sure to make them wrong. If you're going to chuck Honey to the lions, sir, you'll have to chuck me too' (209). Management, as imagined through the figure of Scott, becomes a transposition of wartime command: he does not send a squadron into battle to defend the civilian down below; he demands the grounding of a fleet to defend the civilian in the sky. His is a just war: safety and human lives come above economic interest, vanity and pride. Yet, as the military analogy suggests, the book cannot wholly escape from conventions of normative masculinity. Dispatched to the wilderness to retrieve the components of the crashed prototype Reindeer, Scott finds himself 'determined to show [his guides] that a scientist can also be tough' (257). And indeed, his presence as a frame narrator indicates that there are limits to how far heroism and hegemonic masculinity can be reimagined. Scott – the practical man – is essential to the legitimisation of Honey, whose unworldliness and fascination with esoteric religion make him too bizarre, and too far from a hegemonic ideal still predicated upon 'phallic' ideals of purpose and physical agency, to be the unmediated hero of a thriller (but not, as I will discuss, the hero of a romance). Honey's adventures are reported through distancing third-person narration: although there are sections of the book in which he is the primary focaliser, he does not tell his own story. It is rather Scott's first-person voice that shapes the account, and determines the reception, of his actions. In this, Scott comes to function as a fictional manifestation of the supervisory, rational, middle-class male voice of 'social problem'

cinema. He explains what is wrong with Honey and helps us understand how this damage might be repaired, just as he translates Honey's mathematical calculations into real-world problems. Honey, preoccupied with pure science, has not extrapolated the implications of his experiments; the non-atomic reader cannot be expected to extrapolate: instead, it falls to Scott to repeat, five times across four pages, that 'the Reindeer tail would come to bits in 1,440 hours' (27).

The translation into human terms of a science beyond the grasp of ordinary minds is also, more unexpectedly, facilitated by a range of female characters who support and believe in Honey. Their voices combine with Scott's to reassure the reader that behind the ineffectual blinking eyes and crumpled clothing lie unsuspected greatness. While Scott's rational mind tells him that Honey is sound, women's instincts tell them that Honey is good, and in their chorus of approval, we find a second attempt to reconfigure masculinity for the postwar world. *No Highway* argues, with a breathtaking lack of subtlety, that new British heroes will not be built without a proper breakfast and someone to darn their socks. In contrast to Hammond Innes, who imagined his thinly drawn women as companions and collaborators, Shute tunnels with Woolfian fervour into the psychic interiors of his female characters to reveal that women's fundamental desire – and most appropriate role – is to nurture male genius:

> She recognised in Mr Honey a man of moods, capable of deep depression; all geniuses, she had read, were men like that. She was not a very talented girl herself, nor very highly educated; she had had to go to work too early. She was firmly convinced that Mr Honey was a genius and that he was right about the Reindeer tail. She could not help him in the matter of the Reindeer directly, but she might be able to do something to ease the burdens on his mind. It shocked her that he should be talking of resigning from the RAE. She felt dimly that if that were to happen her country would have suffered an irreparable

> loss, because he was the cleverest man that she had ever met. He had seen through into her secret places at one glance, and had known that she would be good with children.
>
> (166)

These are the thoughts of Marjorie Corder, a beautiful young air stewardess, flying the skies in memory of a lost wartime lover. She is one of two women to fall in love with Honey during his eventful flight to Canada. The other is Monica Teasdale, a world-famous film actress who mourns the memory of the lame office clerk she met before she was famous: 'This man Honey was just such another one as Eddie Stillson, shy, insignificant, brave, and kind. With her experience behind her, she now knew that such men made good husbands, though girls seldom realised it. There was security in them' (88). Shute's account of women's psychology painfully bears the imprint of late-war gender ideology: the more or less subtly mediated demand that women resume a 'normative' domesticity and regenerate family life. The book's aggressive pronatalism is asserted in the eventual triumph of youthful Marjorie over the ageing Monica: both women yearn to make a home with the kindly Honey, but in a world where women's value is situated solely in her domestic and reproductive capacities, only one of them is fit to serve. This is emphatically *not* a world in which women can have it all, a situation bitterly encapsulated in the publicly successful Monica Teasdale's conclusion that she has 'always been some kind of passenger' (215). She cedes the ground to her rival, as a man like Honey has 'a right to a young wife, who'll have some children for him' (215).[35]

It might be wondered, given the opening description of Mr Honey, how he could come to have such a fatal charm for the opposite sex. For all the iterations of his unprepossessing 'littleness' and his description as an 'inside man' (150), he has women queuing up to help him, seemingly unable to resist his unworldly combination of unkempt clothing and vulnerable blinking eyes. The reasons for

his appeal are straightforwardly linked to the novel's assumption that the maternal is women's primary emotional drive, and their professional business. Honey is 'at home' with women: warm, charming and kind in their unthreatening presence. He listens and makes no assumptions about his right to dominate; he respects women's views (at least on domestic matters) and is rendered perversely attractive by his single-parent state. Indeed, women flock to the aid of his daughter, desperate to save for conventional femininity a child with a worryingly 'good grasp of crystallography', but no decent frocks (168). Honey's gender-blind child-rearing, like his scientific theories, is ahead of its time, and is framed as another sign of the need for professional female intervention. Elspeth needs a mother, and so, it would seem, does Honey. In the gendered logic of the novel, nothing could be more desirable, making Honey not only a bizarrely romantic figure but also a man ideally placed to reconstitute the postwar family. His long-lost social life involved cinema-going, country dancing and rambles with his wife (56); his grief since her death has inhibited all social interaction beyond those associated with his esoteric research enquiries.[36] He is, thus, disconnected from normative homosociality, and does not need to be reclaimed from the intense male bonds of wartime. His marriage to Marjorie can consequently be seen as a model performance of domestic citizenship. Two of the war-bereaved are united in a romance that stabilises the family and, by extension, regenerates national life in the aftermath of war. In a simple division of labour, men would be experts in the office; women, experts in the home. Together, they would defend a concept of family paradoxically understood as both eternally fixed and disturbingly fragile.[37]

Honey's peculiar proximity to the feminine thus offers a historically specific and slightly deceptive reimagining of masculinity. His plot trajectory enacts a cultural imperative to 'move on' from grief, and to remake the home, and, in the process, re-establish his own masculine status. This is a new symbiosis but not, ultimately, a significant reconfiguration of masculine norms. The difficulty – perhaps impossibility – of deconstructing conventional masculinity is

evident in the example of Scott. As indicated earlier, he combines successful domestic breadwinning with a bureaucratic competence that remobilises conventional wartime attributes, but he still feels the need to be tough in the Canadian wilderness. In a patriarchal society in which ideal masculinity is predominantly figured as phallic, letting go of the insistence on firm boundaries – physical, mental or emotional – is far from easy, and even Honey, for all his weaknesses, is able to demonstrate admirable qualities of intellectual resilience. He also, against the odds, reveals a capacity for heroic action.[38] So, although Shute's novel imagines new concepts of jeopardy, and new skills – science, organisation, management – these nonetheless encode very familiar traits: rationality, logic, the refusal of emotion. Honey, at the centre of the story, is less an innovation than a resuscitation of the model of the misrecognised or underestimated hero. His initial description turns out to be singularly apposite: this is a fairy tale in which the 'discontented frog' turns into a scientific prince, his eccentricities explained away as temporary symptoms of his unmarried state, the inevitable fate of 'a genius who had no woman to look after him' (185). Without a wife to deflect his unencumbered exploration of intellectual possibilities, he is confused and waylaid by crackpot 'irrational' theories, even if he does approach them in a scientific manner. Once the domestic competence of marriage is achieved, by contrast, Honey has the capacity to join Scott as an exemplary 'postwar' hero. The domestic is no longer an emasculating concept that drives men out towards adventure, but is rather established as the foundation of a healthy postwar masculinity.

No Highway thus functions on multiple levels, offering a gender-inverted Cinderella story; a fictional equivalent of the 1950s social problem film, and a study of new technology and the opportunities for man-making it presents. Only one of these narratives survived with any conviction into the 1951 film version, *No Highway in the Sky*.[39] Given that the cinema could not face the original undiluted Sammy Rice, it is not entirely surprising to find that it also was not ready for Theodore Honey. Indeed, casting James Stewart as the

frog-like scientist is a fairly significant reimagining of Shute's original.

JAMES STEWART · MARLENE DIETRICH
NEVIL SHUTE'S GREAT NOVEL
NO HIGHWAY IN THE SKY
NO HIGHWAY
Glynis JOHNS · Jack HAWKINS · Janette SCOTT
LOUIS D. LIGHTON
HENRY KOSTER
Screen Play by R. C. SHERRIFF, OSCAR MILLARD and ALEC COPPEL
20th CENTURY-FOX

Illustration 1.1 *No Highway in the Sky*, 1951 film poster, Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

The decision to make Honey an American, and to utilise Hollywood star power, was not inevitably going to lead to disaster, and the first half of the film offers a plausible mediation of the book. Scott, played by Jack Hawkins, arrives, encounters Honey, begins to investigate the crashed Reindeer, meets Honey's preternaturally adult daughter Elspeth and waves Honey off on his transatlantic voyage. The flight, too, carefully follows the pattern of the book, but after the 'grounding' of the Reindeer, the film changes direction.

Scott practically disappears from the narrative, and his role as Honey's advocate is assumed, in muted form, by the Director (Ronald Squire), a significantly older actor not in a position to deflect from Stewart's centrality. The conspicuous downgrading of Scott is exacerbated by the framing of those shots in which he does appear, most of which centre on Stewart or co-star Marlene Dietrich (playing Monica Teasdale): seldom speaking and shot primarily from behind, Hawkins's shoulder has more screen time than his face. Stewart's Honey, meanwhile, is childishly excited – or perhaps intoxicated – by the cause and effect of pulling the undercarriage lever, as if to suggest a fantastical liberation from his backroom status. Emboldened by his action, his eccentricities, while not disappearing, are channelled into a conventional man-making trajectory that replaces heroic bureaucracy and collaboration with individual agency.[40] In an accelerated conclusion, Marjorie (Glynis Johns) urges Honey to fight for his beliefs and, while a long way from Stewart's filibuster speech in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), the film mutates into a distinctly American fairy tale. Honey stands up in the meeting and makes an energetic, forceful intervention:

> I don't know what I'm going to do about this. I sat there and I thought I might write the *Times* a letter, but I don't think they'd understand either, so the first thing I'm going to do is to resign right here and now … and then every time a Reindeer is going to take off that shouldn't, I'm going to go out there and – schck [mimes pulling lever] – wreck. Now you may put me in jail … but they wrote a lot about me when I wrecked that one in Gander and they'll write more about me here and people just won't get on those aeroplanes. And I'm gonna tell you something else. The minute anything does happen to one of these Reindeers, you're going to have to think of something better to say than anything I've heard here this afternoon. That's all. Good day.

As a glut of Reindeer tails fall off and vindicate him, the foundational, and very British, inarticulacy of Shute's Theodore Honey is overwritten by American performative conventions. Stewart's customary small-town bewilderment gestures towards the character's fictional form, but the film's plot is reconfigured to enable a significantly different denouement based around an established star persona.[41] Casting is not neutral and, as John O. Thompson has persuasively argued, 'a good deal of the meaning of a fiction film is borne by its actors and their performances'.[42] Inserting James Stewart into *No Highway* fundamentally changes the interpretative possibilities of the text, producing, in the end, a film whose tail collapses.[43]

Before the film crosses the Atlantic, however, it produces a resonant line that speaks effectively to the postwar world and the preoccupations of this chapter. The filmic Scott is no longer a scientist but has rather been reimagined as a former pilot. Drinking with an old colleague, who has just landed after a series of hair-raising aerobatic stunts, he is ribbed for assuming a desk job: 'pilots and desks, cats and dogs, natural enemies'. While this statement acts as a reminder, if any were needed, of the work to be done in reimagining masculinities, it also signals the distance between cinematic and fictional reinventions. The screen demanded male heroes with some form of presence, and – as the next chapter will discuss – the pilot remained a staple figure of film drama long after hostilities had ended. How and what he signified, however, would be subject to radical change, and *No Highway* can also be seen to participate in this process of mythical deconstruction. Shute's vision of the pilot is at one with his perception, mapped out in his autobiography, that flight had undergone a paradigm shift following the technological developments of the Second World War. Where once the pilot was possessed of a perilous vocation with the potential to transcend the limitations of class, now he has become not just a technician but a public servant, a figure responsible for his aircraft and the safe transit of citizens. Samuelson, the captain of the Reindeer, epitomises this transition. Tubby and domesticated, in the

adventure of *No Highway*, he is a peripheral figure, another 'little' man. He is proud to be vice-captain of his local bowls club and lives for the pleasures of this quotidian homosocial environment. Like most of the other characters, he mourns a loss, in this case, his friend Bill, the pilot of the prototype Reindeer who has been posthumously blamed for its crash. Samuelson is angry at the systemic failure that has allowed this glib conclusion to stand (66), and from the empirical evidence of his long flying career, he knows there is something wrong with the Reindeer. But while this form of knowledge – the wisdom of experience – is valorised by the text, it is of little use to him among the mandarins of postwar power. Disenfranchised, he becomes another of the text's network of Honey supporters, and a benchmark of the changing cultural status of the flyer. His sentiments, after the enforced grounding of his plane, are telling, and might be taken as an epitaph for the wartime pilot hero: 'I can't say that I'm sorry. I don't aim to be the bravest pilot in the world. Just the oldest' (159).

If Samuelson is the risk-taking pilot reduced to a public servant, or indeed a bus driver, his second pilot is something much less palatable. Dobson is a virile young bully, completely incapable of seeing beyond the surface appearance of Honey. He mocks the 'boffin', dismissing his work and threatening him (67–68, 98, 156). His manner and his refusal to listen is an early embodiment of the 'decline of deference' – even suggesting Raymond Durgnat's concept of the 'cad' – while also seeming to represent the corrupt residue of a redundant wartime sensibility. Dobson carries insouciant, risk-taking irresponsibility into a postwar which demands radically changed priorities: the modern pilot has a duty of care, to preserve life – including his own – not destroy it. Shute, writing about aircraft design in *Slide Rule*, observed that 'you can't sell safety'.[44] As the next chapter demonstrates, in the 1950s, British cinema tried hard to prove him wrong.

[1] Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 13. Francis's

careful demythologisation also observes that the wartime RAF, primarily stationed in Britain, 'constantly travelled back and forward across the frontier between the martial and domestic worlds' (4), combining homosocial culture and heterosexual desire in a fashion that set them apart from most other service personnel. This may have contributed to the postwar adaptability of the flyer, although – as this chapter will show – the recalibration of the balance between risk and responsibility demanded by peace ensured that pilots were not exempt from the challenges of reintegration.

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[2] Francis, *The Flyer*, 16, 17. David Edgerton observes that the RAF's interwar survival was in large part due to its value as a police force engaged in the strategic bombing of colonial populations (*England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (1991), London: Penguin, 2013, 33–34). The ideological implications of bombing as a police action enacted against racial others on the imperial periphery, the colonial double standards pervading British interwar air policy and the anxieties surrounding the threat of air power to the metropolitan centre are discussed by Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 47–89.

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[3] Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 130–31. Edgerton suggests that the disappearance of the bomber behind the myth of the fighter speaks both to the nation's hypocrisy and its 'considerable capacity for self-delusion' (102). Petra Rau pushes further, arguing that, in comparison with the Blitz, the strategic air offensive is a signifying absence in British culture. In a suggestive discussion of the bomber's limited representation, Rau explores the 'rhetorical agility' required to negotiate the blunt, brutal force of air power and its inevitable 'collateral damage', and to transform this into a narrative palatable enough for public consumption and official memorialisation ('"A Knowledge of the

Working of Bombs”: The Strategic Air Offensive in Rhetoric and Fiction’, in *Long Shadows: The Second World War in British Fiction and Film*, ed. Petra Rau, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016, 198, 200–1).

[4] The ‘cyborg’ has been extensively theorised, most influentially by Donna Haraway, whose account of this incomplete, perverse, disruptive, anti-patriarchal feminist figure suggestively asks ‘[why] should our bodies end at the skin?’ (‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s’ (1985), in *The Haraway Reader*, London: Routledge, 2004, 36). Haraway’s cyborg seeks to challenge the limitations of conventional female embodiment and is far from offering an analogue for Barthes’s jet age. However, her concern with rewriting the boundaries of corporeality usefully gestures towards the interdependencies of the prosthetic: ‘Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment’ (38). When invoked in this study, the cyborg occupies a spectrum of human–machine hybridity embracing positions from radical enhancement to interdependency to annihilatory threat.

[5] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), London: Vintage, 1993, 71.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Nevil Shute, *Slide Rule: The Autobiography of an Engineer*, London: Heinemann, 1954, 11.

[8] Ibid., 4.

[9] It is also, as Edgerton notes, a class transition: 'During the interwar years English aviation and the aircraft industry had been aristocratic and heroic. But during and after the war it became essentially middle-class and dominated by engineers.' The aircraft industry was at the heart of 'a new technical middle-class' (*England and the Aeroplane*, 155–56).

[10] Shute celebrates this lost golden age of adventure in the opening chapter of *Round the Bend* (1951), which depicts the immensely popular National Aviation Day displays run by Sir Alan Cobham. The novel is able to imagine the continuation of aeronautical individualism in the aftermath of the Second World War by shifting the narrative to the peripheral spaces of post-coloniality, as the hero builds an airfreight business in Bahrein.

[11] Various critics have offered definitions of the thriller form. Key features identified by Jerry Palmer include the isolation and professionalism of the hero, from whose point of view the story must be told. Equally essential is conspiracy and a mode of competitive individualism (*Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*, London: Edward Arnold, 1978, 87). Palmer also distinguishes between the positive and negative thriller. The first is embodied by Fleming's Bond stories; the second infuses the same basic structure with a bleak uncertainty about the state of the world and an element of fallibility in the hero (50–52). In this period, Innes's work tends towards the negative formula, with heroic fallibility taken to an extreme. This variant would go on to find popular success in the hands of Alistair Maclean, who – after the bruising combat realism of *HMS Ulysses* (1955) – turned to the formula for such novels as *Fear is the Key* (1961) and *The Satan Bug* (1962). The form would later successfully be adapted and developed by writers such as Desmond Bagley and Dick Francis, who from his first novel, *Dead Cert* (1962), made the formula his

own, replacing the power of the machine with the risk and reward embodied in riding powerful racehorses (see Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001). A contrasting, and perhaps more supple, definition of the genre is provided by Martin Rubin, who suggests that 'the thriller stresses *sensations* more than sensitivity'. It mobilises conflicting emotions, generates ambivalence and leaves its protagonists in an often passive and vulnerable position (*Thrillers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 6–7).

[12] Hammond Innes, *Air Bridge* (1951), London: Vintage, 2013, 49.

[13] Damaged and veteran masculinities did not disappear from popular narrative – particularly in the cinema – but their dominance was challenged in the late 1950s and 1960s by the emergence of new war stories which retold the conflict from a perspective of confident individual heroism, and by the arrival of heroes for a new generation. These figures were often agents more or less glamorously involved in international intrigue. The James Bond films, beginning in 1962 with *Dr No*, transform Fleming's original veteran hero into a figure more representative of the revitalised popular culture of the new decade (James Chapman, 'A Licence to Thrill', in *The James Bond Phenomenon*, ed. Christoph Lindner, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 93; Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 75–76, 203).

[14] Hammond Innes's four pre-war novels were indebted to the interwar detective story template, using tough reporter heroes to investigate bewildering crimes. Peter Deveril, who features in three adventures, is introduced as a 'brilliant criminologist … reputed to have solved more murders than most men at the Yard', a

reputation he maintains by trouncing the resentful, angry and misguided Superintendent Lunn in their competitive investigation of the 'Merrick Double Murder' (*The Doppelganger*, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1936, 11). Deveril has an air of 'debonair insouciance' (239) and is conspicuously well connected, with friends high up in the police force. At no point is he or his investigative authority seriously threatened. These features are in marked contrast to the postwar novels which would make Innes a bestseller.

[15] A similarly secure and well-connected hero – in this case, a journalist – is also found in Innes's first significant critical success, *Wreckers Must Breathe* (1940).

[16] The exigencies of war prompted a rare hiatus in Innes's already prolific output: only one novel, *Attack Alarm* (1941), was published in the remaining war years. The novel, based on Innes's experience in an anti-aircraft battery, features a journalist-turned-gunner whose lack of military status restricts his freedom of action and ensures he must struggle to make himself believed.

[17] Hammond Innes, *Dead and Alive* (1946), London: Vintage, 2013, 15.

[18] Ibid., 86.

[19] Ibid., 65.

[20] *Oxford Mail*, 27 November 1947. Hammond Innes papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. 9533/14/10/2. In terms of the negotiation of the masculine myth, however, perhaps the most telling, and unintentionally revealing, observation came from the

London *News Review*: 'the whole covers one hectic week in the life of Jim Pryce, a deserter from the Eighth Army (*if ever there was such a thing*) who decides to come home' (italics mine; Add. 9533/14/10/1). Historian Ben Shephard sides with Innes, suggesting that desertion was a 'very serious problem' in the Eighth Army (*A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914–1994* (2000), London: Jonathan Cape, 2000, 239).

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[21] Jenny, in Hammond Innes's *Maddon's Rock* (1948), is not only an excellent sailor but also a former agent, parachuted into France, captured and imprisoned in Poland; Jill, in *The Blue Ice* (1948), a linguist, sailor and skier, is given a background with the Norwegian Kompani Linge, a branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE); Jean, in *Campbell's Kingdom* (1952), was a wireless operator in France, her veteran status confirmed by the scars on her face and her familiarity – and comfort – with firearms (London: Vintage, 2013, 74, 149–52, 235).

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[22] The damaged postwar cad is rapidly joined in the cinema by a new-generation cad: young men whose irresponsible delinquency indicates that they have not been tested or tempered by war. In films such as *The Blue Lamp* (1950) and *Cosh Boy* (1952), deviant masculinity is attributed, at least in part, to the absence of appropriate father figures.

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[23] Innes, *Air Bridge*, 35.

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[24] In cases where there is no viable father figure, as, for example, in *The Killer Mine* (1947), the women exhibit a desire to be regularised, rescued from their anomalous positions by the hero as father and lover.

[25] Jenny in *The October Man* is exemplary in her unwavering support for the amnesiac hero wrongfully accused of murder. When everyone else loses faith in him, she continues to believe in his innocence.

[26] There is arguably a transition in the 'Innes woman' as the 1950s progress. Janet Taggart in *The Wreck of the Mary Deare* (1956), is fiercely loyal, first to her father and then to her husband, but has little to do beyond expressing this loyalty, while in *The Land God Gave to Cain* (1958), Paule Briffe proves her love for her father by stabbing her innocent lover – a wayward act of revenge attributed as much to her Franco-Indian heritage as to her femininity.

[27] Innes, *Air Bridge*, 52, 121. Subsequent page references given in the text.

[28] Indeed, the engine mobilises what might be termed the 'mechanical sublime': it is awe-inspiring and exceptional. Through the agency of its high priest Saeton, it demands sacrifices, distorts perceptions and generates paranoia, becoming a compact version of H. G. Wells's 'The Lord of the Dynamos'. Like Wells's potent 'Dynamo Deity' – a 'machine enthroned' – the Satan Mark II engine will ultimately boast a martyr in Saeton and a sacrifice in Tubby (*The Country of the Blind and Other Selected Stories*, London: Penguin, 2007, 5). My thanks to Leo Mellor for this suggestive connection.

[29] Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 173.

[30] For the representation of Germany and German women in postwar British culture, see Judith Vonberg, *'Mirrors of Ourselves': Fictional Depictions of Germans and Britons in British and German Popular Culture 1945–1965*, unpublished PhD thesis, Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2017.

[31] *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph*, 17 November 1951. Hammond Innes papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. 9533/14/15/35 (i–iv).

[32] *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 September 1951. Hammond Innes papers, Cambridge University Library, Add. 9533/14/15/10. Positive reviews included *The Sunday Times* (28 October 1951) and, notably, the *Chicago Tribune*, whose reviewer Milton Crane found plot and character 'frighteningly plausible' (Add. 9533/14/15/56, 23 March 1952). Innes's novels were regularly reviewed across the popular and broadsheet press throughout the English-speaking world, from the USA to South Africa. All these reviews have been preserved and form a remarkable archive of mid-century taste.

[33] Nevil Shute, *No Highway* (1948), London: Pan, 1963, 150.

[34] Ibid., 13. Subsequent page references given in text.

[35] Sonya Rose surveys expectations surrounding women and domesticity at the end of the war, finding accounts of women's desire for a return to conventional home life in both official reports and the popular press. Yet, this dominant rhetoric tells only part of the story: statistics indicate many women were keen to continue with paid employment and Rose describes a 'spate of programmes … [that] offered to help prepare women to return to a life of

domesticity', suggesting that the supposed 'vocation' of homemaking needed rather more conscious readjustment than has been acknowledged (*Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 138–45, 142). In this ambivalent context, Shute's configuration of the choice between career and family in *No Highway* – the argument that woman's true vocation is the service of man – stands out as a particularly brutal postwar assertion of the redundancy of the older, non-reproductive woman.

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[36] Honey and his wife are described as 'very simple people' (56), implying a class-based dismissal of their lack of sophistication. While Shute clearly wants to give a heroic role to an unconventional man, he struggles to avoid patronising a figure who lacks the confident assertiveness and social poise of normative middle-class masculinity.

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[37] Jeffrey Weeks, quoted in Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 189. Shapira distinguishes between the wartime emphasis on 'collective citizenship' and a postwar 'domestic citizenship' configured as 'an understanding of citizens' contribution to the nation as related to establishing the correct home and family' (112–13). She also examines the rhetoric of parenting in the period which increasingly emphasised the mother's full-time, formative role (237). The ideas of John Bowlby, percolated through the popular press, produced terrifying articles on the perils of separation from the mother. Citing the *Daily Mail*, 8 April 1952, Shapira observes: 'The newspaper reported that the child starved of mother-love will often suffer for the rest of his life. "The effect may show in a warped personality – spanning the gamut of anti-social tendencies from failure as a citizen to delinquency, and

sometimes extending to the acutest forms of mental disorder"' (230).

[38] In the words of Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, phallic masculinity is conventionally understood as 'aggressive, violent, penetrating, goal-directed, linear' ('The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity', in *Theorising Masculinities*, eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, London: Sage, 1994, 239).

[39] The film was released in the UK as *No Highway*, in the USA as *No Highway in the Sky*. The American title is used to distinguish book and film.

[40] Elspeth, too, experiences a rapid transition towards gender normativity. The emphasis in Shute's novel is on reinstating her childhood and 'broadening her warped, one-sided life' (*No Highway*, 233, 251). The film explicitly prepares her for femininity, with the departing Monica asking Marjorie to 'keep on telling [Elspeth] she's pretty'. Where the novel's Elspeth sleeps with her 'best thing' – the marvellous domestic innovation of a dishmop (36) – the cinema version embraces a diaphanous new frock.

[41] Stewart biographer Marc Eliot has little to say about the film beyond noting the tensions between former co-stars Dietrich and Stewart, and the fact that Stewart was hospitalised for an emergency appendectomy during filming, a factor which might well have contributed to rough cuts in the production (*James Stewart: A Biography*, London: Aurum, 2006, 254–55).

[42] John O. Thompson, 'Screen Acting and the Commutation Test', *Screen*, 19:2, 1978, 55.

[43] Putting an American actor into a British film does not necessarily effect such radical change. Burgess Meredith, cast as the psychiatrist Felix Milne in the film version of Nigel Balchin's *Mine Own Executioner* (Anthony Kimmins, 1947), causes little disruption to the narrative. Notably, however, the film was scripted by Balchin and the tightly directed adaptation proved as succinct and cohesive as the novel. In addition, Meredith's casting usefully emphasised Milne's status as a lay analyst, an outsider at odds with the medical establishment.

[44] Shute, *Slide Rule*, 172.

Chapter 2

Cinema in the Sky

Risk, Responsibility and Domestic Citizenship

◈

Given the potency of the wartime myth of the flyer, it is not surprising that airmen should continue to feature in films in the years after the conflict. What is perhaps more surprising is the speed at which their screen representation mutated from unqualified heroism to an anxious ambivalence.[1] Increasingly, the airman appeared as damaged, dangerous or simply adrift. The traumatised pilot POW, symbol of the unseen damage of war, is at the heart of Nigel Balchin's adaptation of his novel *Mine Own Executioner* (1947), while in *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947), former RAF officer Clem moves swiftly from being bored and drunk to active criminality. In the paranoid Cold War conspiracy thriller *High Treason* (1951), the RAF sergeant wireless instructor is a feeble and easily led figure who just wants to be left alone to 'think things out'; similarly, the test pilot in *The Teckman Mystery* (1954) is weak, easily manipulated and better at dealing with technology than the intricacies of politics and

rhetoric, a marked contrast to the cultural authority – verging on star status – enjoyed by actual postwar test pilots.[2] *Broken Journey* (1948), by contrast, distinguishes between types of airman: the reckless warrior and the reliable public servant. In this film, the heroine must forget a wartime flyer-cad and learn to love the more prosaic postwar masculinity of a modest charter pilot played by James Donald, an actor who came to personify reliability in the period.[3]

Probably the most melodramatic manifestation of the flyer gone bad, though, is Ealing's *Cage of Gold* (Basil Dearden and Michael Relph, 1950). In this extreme reversal, Wing Commander Bill Glennon (David Farrar) lies, steals and blackmails his way through the postwar world, deploying his glamorous RAF uniform to mesmerise Judy (Jean Simmons), the woman who once admired him and who he now thinks will make him a usefully wealthy wife. In competition for the affections of Judy is Alan (James Donald, once again), a dedicated doctor, symbol of the postwar settlement and the values of the welfare state. It is an unequal battle, made all the more disturbing by Bill's habit of returning from the dead, a dazzling manifestation of both pre-war glamour and wartime glory. Farrar's performance is admirably threatening, his air of menace intensifying as his actions become more extreme. Yet, throughout the film, he maintains his civilised veneer and confident air of command, exposing all that culture feared about the moral ambivalence (and disturbing attractions) represented by the decommissioned warrior. The gothic dimension of such 'Byronic' characterisation is noted by Andrew Spicer, who describes Bill as *un homme fatal*.[4] This is apt: Bill cuts a swathe through postwar pieties with his uninhibited enjoyment of a physical, sensory world, Farrar's performance evoking the spirit, if not quite the appearance, of Margaret Lockwood's iconic 'wicked lady'.[5] Dedicated to his own pleasure and fatally attractive to women, he must, like all good *femmes fatales*, ultimately be punished by death.[6] The noir framework of the film is supplemented by a gothic sensibility evident in its composition,

which playfully evokes Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In the opening sequences of the film, Judy paints Bill in his RAF uniform, and, as Burton and O'Sullivan have noted, in a carefully framed shot, the finished portrait comes between Alan and Judy at the very point of his proposal. Alan cannot compete with Bill's prosthetic uniform and the dashing, conventionally heroic masculinity that it encodes, and, unsurprisingly, Judy turns him down. But, as the film progresses, the portrait becomes a symbol of duplicity, its uniformed magnificence signifying not substance but lack. Beneath Bill's uniformed beauty lies a disfiguring reality of corruption and amorality.

Not all postwar pilots went to the dark side, but even those who did not were asked to reprioritise. Peter Penrose in *The Way to the Stars* (1945) must put his grief for lost comrades behind him and take on the risk – and urgent necessity – of rebuilding the heteronormative family. Peter Carter, in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), is very literally grounded by his miraculous escape from death. Falling without a parachute from a burning plane, his impossible survival forcibly removes him from the narrative of war and inserts him into a love story. Arguing for his right to continue living against the odds and his allotted span of years, Peter's celestial defence asserts that love changes everything: he now has an investment in heterosexual futurity. Yet, in all these narratives, a transition is taking place: the gradual demythologisation of the once exceptional heroic figure, as well as his workplace environment. Nowhere is this process more evident than in a pair of flight-related films made by Ealing in the mid-1950s. *Out of the Clouds* (Basil Dearden and Michael Relph, 1955) and *The Man in the Sky* (Charles Crichton, 1957) both negotiate postwar masculinity through the imaginative possibilities and limitations of flight, together encapsulating the challenge of constructing a new heroism that was safely domestic and yet appropriately risky.[7] Significantly, both films insert a new organisational factor into their reconfiguration of masculinity, each narrative linking the self-respect of the individual

male agent to the stability of corporate enterprise and, beyond that, to national status and pride.

Feet on the Ground: Ealing in the Air

> Over the great buildings [of London Airport] the flags of all the airlines which used them moved gently in the wind. Nothing had been spared to make this gateway to the world a place of which Britain could be proud, which foreigners might envy.[8]

The harnessing of aircraft and the aircraft industry to myths of the nation was a widespread feature of postwar popular culture, from newsreel coverage and magazine articles to fiction, the cinema and such spectacular events as the Farnborough Airshow.[9] David Edgerton argues that advances in flight technology were seen as generating wider economic and social developments, creating a synecdochic linkage in which 'aircraft were an encapsulation of the technological prowess of a nation and an index of its commitment to modernity'.[10] An iconic aircraft had won the war; an iconic aircraft would win – or at least enable Britain to compete in – the peace. Britain's heroes would be the men who flew those symbols of a vibrant technocratic nation. Not just corporate dividend or scientific progress but the whole nation's reputation was at stake in the success or failure of an individual aircraft, as is evident from the bureaucratic response to the Reindeer's fall from grace in *No Highway*. The intimate relationship between aircraft and nation is equally central to John Fores's *The Springboard* (1956), a loose fictional adaptation of Ealing's film. Here, in contrast to the film version, a central motor of plot is the race between American and British manufacturers to get a long-range turboprop aircraft up and running on the prestigious transatlantic route. Fores's novel is given to lengthy exposition, in particular concerning London airport – 'the finest in the world in conception and in fact' – but by the book's

conclusion, he has distilled his core message down to exactly the relationship described by Edgerton.[11] The book's central character, Duty Officer Nick Millward, muses:

> Had the Briton won? – she would have been in New York some time if all had gone well. The pride and satisfaction which he had known in his work yesterday flooded into him again as he thought of the great machine and all it meant to the British industry and to his Company. What a change had come about in the few short years he had been here – from the old, slow, inefficient transports of yesterday to these modern marvels headed by the Briton. Now N.O.A. [National Overseas Airways] had the finest aircraft on all the air routes of the world, and they were British. An airline was as good as its machines, and its men.[12]

The film original wisely veers away from such jingoistic over-exuberance, but with the benefit of colour photography and an attractive cast of actual aeroplanes, it does not need to put its message into words in quite such a naïve fashion. The sleek machine performers of *Out of the Clouds*, whose appearances are intercut with bustling terminal scenes and glimpses into the organisational dynamo of the airport, combine to create a mise-en-scène of international hyper-modernity. This is the future, and in Ealing's unexpectedly tactful reconfiguration, it is not entirely British.[13]

There is no doubt, though, that both *The Springboard* and *Out of the Clouds* worship the man-and-nation-making prosthesis of the aeroplane. *The Man in the Sky*, by contrast, sits in uncomfortable relation to this dominant narrative; indeed, it offers a story in which the drive for technological enhancement threatens to crush, rather than enable, the pilot protagonist. Unlike *Out of the Clouds*, which has a portmanteau structure featuring a range of plots and sub-plots, the narrative design of *The Man in the Sky* is tightly focused. Running in close to real time – one afternoon in a working man's life

– its eighty-four minutes offer a succinct and effective representation of the pressures of postwar masculinity.[14]

The film's opening sequence emphasises domestic modernity as a father and his children make sandcastles in their garden. The children are avatars of the future, fascinated by atom bombs and flying saucers; their father is the embodiment of the present, a man unable to afford the house both he and his wife desire, caught between domestic obligations and a job that brings pressure but not pleasure. John Mitchell (Jack Hawkins) is a test pilot, but the role is configured as utterly mundane. He is not the hero of a brave new technological future but rather an office worker, a salesman in the sky, and the narrative's necessary risk is generated as much by the fear of bankruptcy as by the dangers of flight. The company is on the verge of going out of business, putting the pilot, his family and a whole community of workers in jeopardy. As if further to underline the quotidian reality of the pilot's bureaucratic modernity, the test aircraft is far from photogenic: a chunky, un-streamlined freighter.[15] The redundancy of conventional male heroism is matched by the prosaic functionality of the machine, turning the test-pilot narrative away from the fantasy of the jet age and into a form of 'utility' melodrama in which a lumbering bus with a rocket switch is expected, but notably fails, to assume a heroic role. The freighter's lack of heroism and its relationship to a beast of burden is heightened by a rather different mode of anthropomorphism than that enjoyed by the mighty 'Briton', conqueror of the Americans in *The Springboard*.[16] The aeroplane at the centre of *The Man in the Sky*, we are repeatedly told, is a 'cow', and in a long central sequence in which Mitch must 'stooge around' using up fuel, the now crewless cabin echoes with an uncanny lowing, as desolate creaks and groans emerge from the airframe and its massive cargo.

Ealing had long had a reputation for narratives of duty and unvarnished realism.[17] *The Man in the Sky* certainly provides that, but also persists with a muted variant of the metonymic relationship between manhood, machine and nation. Ashmore, the potential

buyer for this freighter, is American, and after the test flight goes wrong – an engine catches fire and is only extinguished through a risky dive – he alone has confidence in the pilot's ability to land the stricken craft. Indeed, he announces he will be buying the aircraft, if Mitch can land it, on the grounds of its remarkable resilience under stress. Yet, Ashmore's role is a slight one, a background endorsement of British virtues, and the film's primary preoccupation is with the pressure of work and the restoration of male self-confidence. *The Man in the Sky* translates the test pilot's exceptionality into the realm of the quotidian by presenting Mitch's choices as based on the domestic responsibility of breadwinning. As Michal Shapira's study of the construction of the 'democratic self' indicates, this was the socially sanctioned role for the postwar male, and its pressures would have been all too familiar to the audience.[18] In a hyperbolic manifestation of work anxiety, Mitch's job is revealed as insecure on two levels: the company might fold and he might die. In spite of being told, repeatedly, to bail out and save himself, he insists on attempting to land the aeroplane and in so doing arguably takes the Ealing narrative of duty to the extreme of suggesting that even an inadequately remunerated job is worth dying for. Such a narrative depends upon the acceptance of irreconcilable oppositions: on the one hand, Mitch is a man like any other with wife and children and domestic responsibilities; on the other, he is a man whose job involves a level of risk comparable to wartime.[19]

Illustration 2.1 A job worth dying for? *Man in the Sky*

The relatively short running time and condensed narrative offers little in the way of backstory and places great emphasis on the visual manifestation of Mitch's bad day at the office. The pilot's existential crisis – his decision to prove his manhood and save the company by not bailing out – is painfully public. A huge crowd, comprised of management, factory workers, fire crews, ambulance units, bystanders, journalists and a passing group of cyclists, gathers to watch the free spectacle of a potential crash. Even a tea urn is provided for their comfort. The performance of masculinity – duty, professionalism, courage, skill – is enacted on a huge stage, but while the crowd below can see the plane and hear Mitch's voice, only the cinema audience sees the man inside, and Hawkins conveys the supreme discomfort and fear underpinning Mitch's self-presentation through a range of bodily tics. He sweats, shifts around

uneasily, facing up to the camera's relentless focus on the tiny markers of fear that disturb his implacable façade. Mitch's lonely wait might have offered an opportunity for flashback or reminiscence – David Niven's Peter Carter, preparing to die at the beginning of *A Matter of Life and Death*, is far more self-revealing in a fraction of the time – but the focus on Mitch's present dilemma, and the limits of the expressive range through which he might articulate and manage this, is crucial to the drama.

Illustration 2.2 Pressure, *Man in the Sky*

Unlike Powell and Pressburger's pilot hero, Mitch is no poet, and for much of *The Man in the Sky*, meaning emerges as much from faces as from dialogue. As Hawkins sweats, the passage of time between the initial crisis and Mitch's eventual landing is marked only

by cutaways to the variously enthralled or anxious spectators and to the parallel day in the life of his wife Mary (Elizabeth Sellars) and their two boys. The camera stares intrusively, lingering on the faces and bodies of Hawkins and Sellars, both of whom give excellent performances, first of containment and then of the limited collapse permitted by middle-class emotional mores. Yet, among the few facts we are given to flesh out the characters is the knowledge that two of Mitch's closest friends have recently been killed, and their loss has affected him. Naturally, it is an impact he has not been able to articulate, but the implication is that their deaths have prompted a renewed awareness of mortality and the precariousness of his profession. Mary, in conversation with her mother, tries to analyse his unspoken crisis, and her conclusion is significant. Asked whether Mitch has lost faith in his ability as a pilot, Mary replies 'no, I don't think so … as a man. He just feels he isn't getting anywhere. Above all he feels he hasn't done enough for us; that he won't be able to'.

Mary is presented relatively sympathetically. She hides her disappointment over not getting the house of her dreams, supports her husband's decisions and manages the family with calm competence. Her flaw, though, is a familiar one – an inability to see the bigger picture. Having been told by a busybody that her husband is 'in very serious trouble', she leaves the house and arrives at the airfield in time to see the perilous landing. Her question on Mitch's return is telling: 'Were you trying to kill yourself?' Crucially, this confrontation between husband and wife, rather than the act of public technocratic heroism involved in the landing, represents the climax of the drama. Both characters are in shock, both forced into an unwelcome encounter with emotions usually repressed by the conventions of middle-class restraint, and their argument climaxes in an astonishing speech from Mitch which lays bare the ongoing coercive power of masculinity:

> You ask me if I thought of you and the boys? I only did it for you and the boys. … There were plenty of reasons for me to stay with that aircraft. Good reasons. It was my duty to try that

> landing so long as there was a chance in a hundred. I don't give a damn what any other man would have done. It was a question of loyalty. Of loyalty to Reg, the company and 120 other people who built the aircraft. And I didn't stay with it for those reasons … I stayed with it because the alternative was to come home and tell you I got into trouble in the air today, so I abandoned the aircraft and the company's out of business. Is that what you would have had me do? Well that would have been the end. I should have spent the rest of my life never quite looking you or the boys in the face again, or myself for that matter. A man who quit when there was still a chance. That's what I would have been. And that's what you and the boys would have had. If I'd been killed it would have been better for the three of you than if I'd bailed out and quit. Can't you understand that? The man who said better a live coward than a dead hero was a live coward. Can't you understand that?

Quitting is the ultimate disgrace: a take-home motto for all middle-class audience members, irrespective of the nature of their employment. Two key postwar transitions emerge from this emotional conflagration. The first is that loyalty to business has replaced loyalty to nation as a day-to-day motor of male purpose: the corporate entity commands a similar life-or-death commitment. The second, that risk brings reward. Having survived his close encounter with death, Mitch proceeds along an entirely conventional re-masculinisation process. His success gives him renewed self-confidence, and a renewed appetite for further risk. The film ends with a phone call to the estate agent and the purchase of a house he cannot afford. In this, *The Man in the Sky* bizarrely becomes a narrative about the triumph of capitalism, or, at least, the value of capitalism as a route to postwar man-making. Corporate loyalty replaces service loyalty and is metonymically linked to the nation, the ideal workplace becoming a shadow version of the wartime community. Yet, ultimately, company, nation and homosocial loyalties are all subordinated to the ideological power of the family and of the

masculine myth. Mitch asserts that it would be easier, and better, to die than to admit failure in the economic combat of breadwinning, a statement that suggests the exemplary masculinity of domestic citizenship is every bit as coercive as the demands of war. Indeed, it is arguably worse, as the struggle is individual. Mitch alone must 'save' his family; he is not part of a squadron or unit working together with purpose. The film yearns for a model of shared homosocial responsibility – traces of which are implicit in the loyalty Mitch feels towards his employers and the network of his colleagues – but the narrative does not permit this to flourish; nor does it offer the homosocial as refuge. Rather, after landing the stricken plane, a shell-shocked Mitch is dispatched immediately to the paradoxical site of pain and pleasure that is the home.[20]

Illustration 2.3 'I only did it for you and the boys', *Man in the Sky*

Illustration 2.4 Shellshocked citizenship, *Man in the Sky*

The Man in the Sky, then, attempts to yoke the re-masculinising power of risk to the structures of domestic heteronormativity. Willingness to accept the first brings the reward of the second: risk itself is not presented as pleasurable or an end in itself. *Out of the Clouds*, by contrast, suggests that risk is all too pleasurable, and for some men, it has become an end in itself. In this, the film seems, on the surface, to fit neatly into a category that Alan Burton and Tim O'Sullivan describe as 'narratives of men after action – seeking action':[21]

> the films are substantially determined by their exploration of stories of men asserting – or reasserting – their masculinity through professional, physical action; usually in an all-male group. Masculine purpose and identity are temporarily

> rediscovered and reinvigorated through a reconstitution of wartime experience; and the crisis is often transgressive, most obviously in tempting the men towards crime in an attempt to rediscover excitement, regain a sense of purpose, re-establish male bonding and challenge the perceived feminisation of society after the war.[22]

On first appearance, *Out of the Clouds* fits this template admirably. Yet, even as the film demonstrates the opportunity of the new era of recreational flight to act as an arena for man-making and risk-taking, both it and *The Springboard* offer profoundly mixed messages as to what might constitute a risk, what its value might be and who, exactly, should take it.[23]

The multiple plotting of the film's portmanteau structure contributes to the mixed messages, and makes the film, in the end, less certain of its direction than the novel. The common ground between the two is a clear-cut narrative of heroic reinscription: the grounded senior duty manager must come to the recognition that he can still be a man without flying. In the novel, Nick Millward is a married father of two and his passage to maturity is aided by the comforts of patriarchy. He sees the future in his son, concluding: 'Paul would fly one day. Paul would take his place, visit those far countries which he had never seen.'[24] In the film, marriage offers its own reward. Nick Millbourne (Robert Beatty) finds himself preferred by the available attractive female, Penny, who ends the film on a horrified exclamation: 'You haven't seriously been thinking that I'd marry a pilot? After what I've seen of them … I want a husband who comes home at night. Every night.' Both novel and film agree in the reconfiguration of the pilot as a man seeking escape, in comparison with the manager who shoulders the responsibility for the thousands who pass through the airport every day. Indeed, *The Springboard* emphasises its message that masculine agency does not reside in wartime history by making villains out of two men who cannot let go of their RAF pasts. Old glories count for nothing and the pressures of managing a *modern* airport are so great that they

expose as inadequate men who had thrived in the paradoxically sheltered environment of wartime.[25]

Yet, while the plot trajectories of the airport staff and aircrew work emphatically to reject risk in favour of regulation and responsibility, the film includes a romance plot that curiously reinstates it, albeit through a series of national and cultural displacements. Central to *Out of the Clouds*, but absent from *The Springboard*, is the story of two passengers, Leah and Bill. Leah, a holocaust survivor, is travelling to America, where she plans to marry a man who was kind to her after the war. Bill is leaving America in search of a suitably technological adventure in Israel, where he intends to work as a hydrologist. Both characters are Jewish and as they meet behind the red line of the transit lounge, Leah fears they have been segregated: 'it's not because we are Jewish?' she asks, nervously. 'No,' replies Bill insouciantly, 'that stuff's out'. This response is typical of the film's management of the recent past, and to a contemporary sensibility, it is jarring, but it speaks to the tension at the heart of the film's multiple narratives.[26] Bill informs Leah that he is going to Israel because he has had too much security; Leah, wonderingly, asks in response 'can you have too much security?' Seemingly destined to go their separate ways, they are thrown back together by the combined forces of British weather and the irascible Captain Brett (James Robertson Justice), who will not fly until he is wholly satisfied with the condition of his troublesome aircraft, 'Sugar Fox'. Such concern for passenger safety is both integral to the film's flight-is-the-future propaganda and a useful, if clunky, plot device. Temporarily grounded, Bill and Leah fall in love. After a comic tour of London clichés, Bill proposes they share a life of hardship and risk in Israel. In the face of Leah's doubts – the post-traumatic aftermath of survival crudely distilled into the materialist assertion 'I won't share misery and poverty' – his argument, significantly, is the same as that which concluded *The Man in the Sky*: only by accepting more insecurity can the fear of insecurity be overcome.

The romance plot is a strange growth grafted onto the stories of the airport workers, and seemingly designed to suggest that air travel not only offers unparalleled speed and luxury, it also holds the possibility of exciting new encounters with a shrinking world. What had once been the pilot's narrative of adventure is transposed onto the passengers. They will see wonders; the pilot will take them there and then go home again, never leaving his machine to engage with the brave new world. Or if he does venture out, it will be to a strange and unsatisfactory encounter with otherness, such as that experienced by the dashing pilot Gus. Gus Ellis appears in both book and film and is the necessary counterpart to Nick's discontent with his grounded status: he is the pilot seeing the world, enjoying both the glamour of flight and the ongoing authority of uniform. Nick, too, wears a uniform, but without the aeroplane to go with it, he is subject to the demeaning demands of managers, workers, unions and passing VIPs. Gus acts a constant reminder of what his life would have been had he not been injured. Fores is moralisingly critical of Nick's dissatisfaction, noting in an introductory section that 'he suffers from a sense of inferiority and from the prevalent disease of self-concern', and, ultimately, Nick is reconciled to his fate by a combination of a good day in the office – leading the charge to get the Briton airborne – and Gus's fall from grace.[27] In *The Springboard*, Gus is a man addicted to risk, smuggling gold not for profit but for the thrill of getting away with it: 'I was just doing it for the mental stimulation, for the kick it gave me … I was greedy, Nick, that's all – greedy for new adventures and new feelings'.[28] The casting of the square-jawed, inevitably heroic Anthony Steel in *Out of the Clouds* perhaps contributed to a less hard-hitting version of the story that displaces responsibility for the smuggling plot onto the usual suspects: women and foreigners. Gus is asked to smuggle by his 'beautiful piece of deadly nightshade', *femme fatale* Eleanor Harcourt, and approached in Cairo by a stereotypically unctuous foreign agent. He resists the demands of both and emerges vindicated. In the film, then, the pilot retains his glamour but oddly does so at the cost of his desirability. He is presented as an

infantilised figure, in emotional terms a boy not a man, who needs to grow up if he is to achieve the reward of domesticity.

These multiple plot trajectories are inextricably intertwined with the possibilities and threats of a new technological modernity. The aeroplane provides Gus with a carapace – a shell as much as a prosthesis – protecting him from the demands of quotidian reality; the airport, meanwhile, is a living, breathing organism that threatens to overwhelm Nick. And, in both book and film, the aeroplanes appear as semi-sentient beings, possessed of personalities and power beyond human control. There is a curious return of the superstitions that shaped wartime flyer narratives, suggesting the aeroplane's simultaneous occupation of radically opposed genders. On the one hand, it remains a masculine prosthesis, extending and enhancing male agency;[29] on the other, it is a symbol of threatening femininity, embodied by a loss of control. Put simply, when flight works, it is the acme of male rationality; when it fails, it is the product of feminine whim.[30] Both narratives feature bad-luck aeroplanes. In *Out of the Clouds*, the irrational feminine is incarnated in 'Sugar Fox'. Her impact, though, is limited, tamed by the authority of James Robertson Justice and by her inadvertent role in furthering Bill and Leah's romance plot. Her counterpart in *The Springboard* is of a different order of magnitude. 'How Zebra was a bitch,' the novel asserts:

> There were aircraft like that, with bitchiness built into them. They had more trouble with How Zebra than with all the rest of the Far Eastern fleet of the National Overseas Airways Company put together. She blew fuses, burst tyres, leaked oil and melted cables. Mechanics fell from her wings and broke their ankles. She sought out and flew into sickening bumps, blackening her navigators' eyes and upsetting the passengers' drinks. She wasn't really dangerous, but just a natural-born bitch.[31]

The airport will pay a high price for underestimating How Zebra, who later lulls the airport workers into a false sense of security with a

display of smug docility before chopping a man in half with her propellers: 'How Zebra stood calmly, touched to sparkling reflections in the sun, casting her wing's shadow over the huddled screens.'[32] Neither book nor film wishes to compromise its message about air safety and the future of transport by actually imagining or representing a crash, but the uncanny sentience and frightening power inherent in such man-eating aeroplanes acts as a potent reminder of violence and of the machine's capacity to exceed the human. The power encoded in Sugar Fox and How Zebra is, however, ultimately contained by male authority and subordinated to the techno-domesticity of Ealing.[33] The same cannot be said of an earlier imaginative encounter with flight's future, David Lean's *The Sound Barrier*, which offered a more ambivalent and yet more enticing message, turning its aircraft not into women but gods.

Up in the Clouds: *The Sound Barrier* and the Technological Sublime

> The happily married man with a large family is the test pilot for me.[34]

Nevil Shute's pithy injunction refers to the interwar years when he worked in the aircraft industry as a founding director of Airspeed Ltd., but its relevance to the world of postwar reconstruction is evident. From *No Highway* to *Out of the Clouds*, the domesticated pilot is figured as the future of aviation – a making safe and regularising of a figure formerly defined through irregularity and risk. Yet, how the story of the pilot's postwar reconfiguration is told complicates the security of this transition. Raymond Durgnat's contention that postwar British directors could be divided into 'moralists' and 'romantics' provides a useful frame and a point of entry for understanding the visual and emotional distance separating

the Ealing presentation of the pilot's domesticity from the approach taken by David Lean in *The Sound Barrier* (1952).[35]

The films of the previous section of this chapter relied, implicitly or explicitly, on a boy-into-man narrative of maturation; *The Sound Barrier* takes a very different approach to imagining postwar male agency. In the first place, there is a difference in scale. The film was made before the Comet catastrophe and thus has the confidence to imagine Britain, her pilots, engineers, designers and aircraft, at the forefront of a new and spectacular modernity. Second, there is a notable generic difference. While both Ealing's flight films and *The Sound Barrier* might be described as 'well-made' melodramas in their deployment of pathos and a shared desire to construct a mode of realism,[36] Ealing's drive is inward and domesticating, while Lean harnesses the archetypal power of the Western, imagining the sky – and the science of speed – as a new frontier to be crossed, a new landscape to be subject to man's domination.[37] And, finally, there is the negotiation of risk, embodied not just in direct man-making activities such as flight but in the whole scientific project. Ealing's intermittent uncanny gestures treated technological modernity – much like the legacy of wartime violence – as a potentially frightening and destructive force that could, nonetheless, be safely put back in the box of domestic citizenship. Lean's vision of science, and the risk it entails, is altogether more apocalyptic: in *The Sound Barrier*, technology stands poised not to enable but to efface the human subject. These differences are considerable, yet, a curious commonality unites the films: Crichton, Dearden and Lean all ultimately take the spectator to a confrontation with the domestic banal and the masculinity of breadwinning, a resurgence of the quotidian that raises unexpected questions about national self-belief even, in Lean's case, at what is arguably the most optimistic moment in Britain's postwar history.

For all its epic scale, then, *The Sound Barrier* is also profoundly concerned with men. Written by playwright and former RAF officer Terence Rattigan, the film offers a far more self-conscious reflection

on what it means not just to be a pilot but to have been a wartime flyer than any of the fictions previously discussed, and running alongside the dominant narrative of the quest for supersonic speed is a quiet concern with how the returning combatant will reconstruct and reassert his masculinity in a changing world. Both fiction and the historical record suggest that the odds of survival for the wartime flyer were poor, and many pilots coped by assuming that they would not need to plan for the future.[38] *The Sound Barrier*, however, asks what to do with the pilot who survives. Can a man who has ideally fulfilled the demands of wartime heroism be recuperated for peace? Ealing's answer is that you encourage him to grow up and settle down, but the pilots discussed earlier had not found their metier in war in quite the same way as Tony Garfield DFC, DSO and AFC. Tony is the insouciant amateur and inspired pilot hero of the Battle of Britain, and it is his masculinity and cultural capital that will be subject to the film's most pressing scrutiny. Weighing the residual value of the Battle of Britain pilot against the emergent needs of postwar modernity, the film tries to conceive a narrative that will legitimise a technically competent non-combatant masculinity, while still respecting the memory, and the myth, of the wartime hero, and, in the process, the film struggles through three different strategies of recuperation. Like the Ealing films and Shute's *No Highway*, *The Sound Barrier* aims first to domesticate the pilot; second, it seeks to construct an elegy for this figure's heroic precursor and shadow self, the mythical wartime warrior; and third, it tries to construct, in the test pilot, a modern alternative to the myth that can somehow balance the demands of both idealisation and conformity. It aims to manufacture a self-effacing quotidian norm. All three of these aims overlap, and it is in the tension between them that the film's failure to construct a confident heroic future can ultimately be found.

At the heart of *The Sound Barrier*, then, is a project of rebuilding heroism and masculinity through technology, and the film is itself a technical achievement. Adrian Smith describes the 'state-of-the-art camerawork' deployed to 'capture the sensation of supersonic speed' and reports Lean's belief that the film represented

'the summit of his career as a technician'.[39] The territorial and ideological conflicts of war are replaced by a battle against the impersonal (and supposedly ideologically neutral) force of science. This is a quest for knowledge – a mode of man-making through testing – but the test is not courage under fire but rather belief in the capacity of the human individual to dominate, or conquer, *his* environment. Discreetly and in modern trappings, Lean reanimates a frontier mythology, but turning science into a frontier is not without its problems. Abstractions and intangible forces, for example, are disturbingly resistant to visual representation. Lean's solution is a reliance on the immensity of skyscapes – science imagined through the sublime – and, appropriately, sound. As Melanie Williams notes, sound matters in the film, from Lean's decision to make key characters listen to catastrophe rather than see it, to the long-awaited reward of a sonic boom.[40] Beyond this, however, is the potent suggestiveness of Malcolm Arnold's score. Arnold repeatedly uses an ethereal music of the spheres to symbolise the threat posed by new technology, suggesting the vulnerability of humanity in the face of the great unknowns of the universe. The spooky, haunting phrasing, which Williams describes as an 'enchantment' motif,[41] also evokes the magical and irrational – cultural markers of a specifically feminine unknown – and thus the male quest for rationalising knowledge of the material world inevitably also becomes a mission to subjugate a threatening feminine other.[42]

How, then, does *The Sound Barrier* mobilise its man-making strategies? RAF officer Tony Garthwaite (Nigel Patrick) meets and marries Sue (Ann Todd), daughter of aircraft manufacturer John Ridgefield (Ralph Richardson). JR, as he is known, is an all-powerful father figure, a driven, seemingly pitiless force, pursuing scientific progress irrespective of human cost. JR has a son as well as a daughter, but Chris, who should in theory be the inheritor of his father's vision, gets air sick and is killed early in the film, trying to live up to the family name. Tony becomes, in effect, a surrogate son, and after the war is given a job as chief test pilot at the enormous

Ridgefield factory. The challenge now is to solve the mystery of what happens to an aeroplane at supersonic speed, and this quest provides for Tony a somewhat delusory continuation of his wartime subjectivity. Kaja Silverman observes that the returning hero 'no longer feels "at home" in the house or town where he grew up and resists cultural (re)assimilation'.[43] 'The fiction of a phallic masculinity', she argues 'generally remains intact only for the duration of the war'.[44] But thanks to Ridgefields and the quest for supersonic flight, Tony does not have to reassimilate. His new job is just like his old, providing such key determinants of wartime masculine subjectivity as the camaraderie of the male group and a substantial element of risk. This redeployment, then, is the film's attempt to establish whether old heroic models are fit for purpose in the postwar world, and sadly, but predictably, the adaptation fails. The postwar is not the same as wartime and being a test pilot is not the same as fighting the Battle of Britain. Tony, with his 'piece of cake talk' and unthinking relationship to flying, proves not to have the brains for the newly technologised science of flight and is killed attempting to take the prototype plane 'Prometheus' through the sound barrier. In terms of masculine agency, the focus of the film then shifts to the narrative's reserve hero Philip Peel (John Justin), whose story frames, and in some sense memorialises, Tony's. It is Philip who eventually breaks the sound barrier, and we first encounter him before the opening credits, performing aerobatics in a Spitfire. He is laughing, enjoying his mastery over the elements, until – caught in too steep a dive – he approaches the speed of sound and finds that the buffeting plane will not respond to the controls. He eventually pulls out of danger, but it is of immediate significance that while Peel continues to think about and analyse his experience, Tony – the archetypal anti-intellectual, inarticulate Englishman – simply dismisses it as inexplicable and heads off to propose to Sue.[45]

Kevin Brownlow, in his biography of David Lean, records that the screenplay only came alive when the central role of JR's antagonist was transformed from a son into a daughter.[46] This

central father–daughter axis, however, could not be more different to that imagined by Hammond Innes, whose daughter cadets carry their fathers' legacies with unwavering loyalty. Sue is an anti-cadet: in what was a key trope of postwar cinema, she becomes the advocate of the human against the all-consuming power of the machine. The film ominously echoes the questions asked in *Scott of the Antarctic*, made just four years earlier, and equally a product of the postwar search for acceptable modes of heroic masculine agency. In this case, conquest is rendered acceptable by the inhospitable, uninhabited terrain, and narratives of military endeavour are displaced onto a founding national myth of heroic failure.[47] However, before the men can go forth and prove their masculinity, they must separate themselves from the feminine. When Oriana Wilson hears that Shackleton has got within ninety miles of the South Pole, she asks Scott why another expedition is necessary:

ORIANA: 'Isn't ninety miles near enough?'

SCOTT: 'No, because it isn't it. It's not the South Pole. That's still there waiting – and, er, I think an Englishman should get there first.'

Sue Garthwaite voices identical sentiments in *The Sound Barrier*, asking her father 'is the ability to travel at 2,000 miles an hour going to be a blessing to the human race?' JR's response is to cite the example of Scott and assert that 'it's just got to be done'.

Sue is a crucial sounding board for the articulation of the masculine quest, and in performing this role, her agency is remorselessly circumscribed. In spite of opening the film as a competent woman in uniform, she quickly becomes the repository of attitudes and ideas archetypally associated with the feminine. Delighted to be called 'Madam' after having been 'Miss' too long, she embodies the assumption that women's wartime roles were for the duration only. This reassertion of a fundamental corporeal femininity is perhaps made most explicit in Tony's response to the news that she is pregnant: 'how clever of you!' he exclaims.

Women's brains, such as they are, have once more been relegated to the womb. Sue also develops a useful secondary role in terms of the film's ambitious technical agenda: she exists to have Mach numbers explained to her. *The Sound Barrier*, then, for all its technological modernity, is a profoundly traditional film in its binary assertion of an active masculinity against a nurturing femininity. Men are visionaries and explorers who push the boundaries of knowledge. Women care for people and, in Sue's case, she is finally – and perhaps not entirely convincingly – reconciled with her father only when he briefly exposes his own vulnerability and expresses doubts about his vision of progress.[48]

The debate about the cost of progress formulated through the opposition of JR and Sue nonetheless contributes to the film's attempt to find new arenas for the masculine quest. Although filmed in black and white, the expansive cinematography emphasises the shrinking boundaries of the world. While *Scott of the Antarctic* revels in astonishing icescapes, *The Sound Barrier* reveals what, for many, would have been a still unobtainable world beyond the clouds.[49] In an extended travelogue sequence, Tony takes Sue to Cairo for lunch: tracked by the control tower clock, their five-hour journey takes them across Paris, the Alps and the Sphinx. Amazed by the beauty of the cloudscape, and the prototype thrill of 'modern' travel, Sue is almost convinced of the joy of flying; but her pleasure is rapidly undercut by the news of the death of Geoffrey de Havilland, whose plane has exploded approaching supersonic speed. This, then, is a dangerous beauty. Like the ice landscapes of Scott, flight speaks to a masculine sublime that offers both greater reward and greater risk than the feminine picturesque.

In this context, the sublime, as embodied in science and nature, might be seen as a viable postwar space for the construction of adventure and for the reformulation of masculinities. This was an era of limit-testing: from the conquest of Everest to the first four-minute mile.[50] But the film seems unwilling quite to commit to such a future. Andrew Spicer notes that *The Sound Barrier* 'combined the fear and fascination of modern science in a rich and tense

ambivalence', and this ambivalence embraces the film's construction of heroism.[51] In the adaptable figure of Philip Peel, domestic citizen par excellence, the film posits a way forward, but it never seems wholly comfortable with the techno-masculine future it proposes. The spectre of Barthes's strangely affect-less jet-man returns, as does Nevil Shute's belief in the superior adventure of early flight; but perhaps most troubling of all, the emergent hero exists in close proximity to the domestic. Peel, and all the test pilots, live at home.[52] They occupy a space that is antithetical to traditional constructions of masculinity. It is the same dilemma faced by Commander Armstrong in Roy Ward Baker's naval drama *Morning Departure* (1950). Armstrong heads off to his submarine like an office worker, promising to be home for tea, a claustrophobic fate that Captain Scott runs to the South Pole to avoid. This domestic discomfort – the intimate encounter of risk and responsibility – comes home to roost in *The Sound Barrier*'s conclusion. The plot has made clear that Tony Garthwaite, a version of the fighter pilot and all he stood for, cannot be rehabilitated for the postwar world, but there is a notable reluctance to commit to the heroism of his replacement. The film seems unable to believe in the shift in hegemonic masculinity that it proposes, and it handles its discomfort in an archetypally British fashion, by turning from the sublime to the ridiculous. Philip Peel's great achievement, the breaking of the sound barrier, is immediately undercut by comedy. Returning to the office space, Peel is assailed first by workplace banter and then by the bathos of domesticity: his wife enters with a monologue about their children's coats which quite literally overwrites Peel's achievement. He cannot get a word in edgeways, and after his wife departs in a whirlwind of high-speed domesticity, he breaks down in tears.

Illustration 2.5 Bathetic achievement, *The Sound Barrier*

Thus, having broken the barrier through his combination of 'brains and imagination', the film works immediately to reinstate Peel within familiar tropes of English masculinity – a mode of being that has always distrusted both brains and imagination. The film reaches immediately for the national stereotype of masculine inarticulacy to cover its embarrassment at conspicuous achievement. Britain has broken the sound barrier and does not know what to do about it.[53] As Krishan Kumar has noted of the nineteenth century, the sheer scale of the Empire, and the dominant position of England within the construction of Great Britain, meant that the 'English could not simply celebrate themselves'.[54] In 1952, at the moment of Empire's fragmentation, as Britain sought energetically for new means of demonstrating its continued global significance, *The Sound*

Barrier regresses to the power of past discourses – the ironic modesty of Empire – in its depiction of masculine subjectivity.

Illustration 2.6 Aftermath, *The Sound Barrier*

Residual constructions of national identity complicate the business of reimagining heroism and postwar male agency. As Andrew Spicer has noted, JR's obsession is fuelled by a sense of national purpose; but what, in the end, undoes technology as a mode of man-making is the power and primacy of the machine.[55] The potency of things has been a preoccupation running throughout this chapter, and *The Sound Barrier* is no exception. This is a film in which aeroplanes get credits, as does a Rolls Royce engine. This is a significant shift even from the construction of the Spitfire as the iconic aircraft of the Battle of Britain. While the Spitfire was undoubtedly celebrated during the war years and after, its status

emerged from a metonymic relationship to the nation, and its facilitation of the 'human' myth of the fighter pilot. Gordon Beckles's *Birth of a Spitfire!* (1941) is a paeon to democratic mass production, in which the product, the Spitfire, is nationalised: this is 'the people's plane', owned by the nation who paid for it through subscription to the Spitfire Fund or through the donation of scrap metal. Importantly, Beckles frames his narrative of industrial production with the human. The book begins with the pilots who fly the planes, turning the Spitfire into a conduit connecting the individual hero to the nation and its war effort. The people are given an investment in a mode of heroism beyond identification for all but a few. One pilot reports: 'We've got a machine paid for by girls in shops', concluding that 'you'd think they would have better things to spend their money on'. '*They* don't think so,' replies the author.[56] The Spitfire is mythologised in accordance with the propaganda needs of the nation. The emphasis falls on belonging and communality, even attempting to find a means through which women can invest in the mechanical.[57]

However, 'a' Spitfire paid for by shop girls does not come close to the status achieved by 'Prometheus' in *The Sound Barrier*. Here, the fetishisation of the machine suggests a previously unimagined process of hybridisation. While Roald Dahl's wartime short stories had suggested a symbiosis of man and machine in which the aircraft becomes a prosthetic extension gifting immense power to the human agent, in *The Sound Barrier*, the human agent is insignificant in comparison with the aircraft, in both technological and symbolic terms.[58] Talking to Will, his chief designer, JR articulates this transference of authority, asserting that when Tony crashed, it was not Prometheus that failed: 'it's too good an aircraft to lose … the best that came out of England since the war'. Not only does JR finally articulate Tony's failure, he also displaces the concept of heroism, and with it national identity, onto the machine. And here resides the embryonic formulation of Barthes's 'jet-man': the moment of 'a sudden mutation between the earlier creatures of

propeller-mankind and the later ones of jet-mankind'.[59] The human reaches an end point and the machine progresses. The naming of the machine also gives pause for thought. The Prometheus of legend made humans out of clay; in *The Sound Barrier*, Prometheus becomes the hero that enables the malleable and insignificant human to achieve the impossible (supersonic flight). The god-plane Prometheus brings about a paradigm shift in the creation of jet-mankind. Yet, even as this triumph is celebrated, the film makes clear that new powers have new consequences.

Significantly, the power of the machine is not simply the subject of verbal debate in the film, it is also subject to a disturbing and disruptive visual representation. Alongside Lean's expansive and beautiful representations of flight are set the film's necessary and awful depictions of flight's failure: the crash (arguably the signifying absence of Ealing's technological vision). There are two crashes in *The Sound Barrier*, and together they form a narrative, a visual encoding of the power and threat of modernity that can be understood through comparison with *Reach for the Sky* (1956), Lewis Gilbert's adaptation of the biography of fighter pilot Douglas Bader (more fully discussed in Chapter 6). What is demonstrated in these films is the changing relationship between man and machine. The pre–Second World War balance of power is demonstrated in *Reach for the Sky* through the mise-en-scène of the 1931 accident in which Bader lost both his legs. The outcome of the crash is a mangled melange of man and machine, in which there appears to be an almost equivalent vulnerability. Surrounded by the fragments of his still aeroplane-shaped machine, Bader sits dazed and damaged but still recognisably human. He does not emerge intact – the machine has claimed a part of him, and his injuries are catastrophic and life-threatening – but he does emerge. In due course, his masculine agency is restored through the mechanical: he flies again with artificial legs. Man and machine achieve not so much symbiosis as part exchange. In contrast, the first crash in *The Sound Barrier* emphasises the threat of the machine. Trying to land on his first solo voyage, JR's son Chris crashes his Tiger Moth training plane. He

cannot be pulled from the wreckage as Bader was, but there is still a recognisable wreckage which, engulfed by fire, becomes a funeral pyre for the failed hero, the boy who could not become a man. In representational terms, there is a contrast between the crash as a tangle of bodies, human and mechanical, and the crash as a body of wreckage containing the body of a man.

This crash, in turn, must be compared to the belatedly revealed spectacle of *The Sound Barrier*'s second disaster. This is the crash that the viewer has been abjectly dreading and yet anticipating. Its inevitability has been written into the film with all the certainty of fate in a Greek tragedy. When it comes, the crash is 'experienced' from the control tower. We hear Tony's increasingly desperate voice, the scream of the engines and the kindly voice of Will crying 'bail out' repeatedly into the microphone. From this escalating sense of catastrophe, the film cuts to silence and a man running across a field. In the bottom left corner of the screen lies a small piece of smoking rubble. Another man runs from the opposite direction, stepping over further unrecognisable fragments of metal. As the two men converge tremulously on the edge of a huge smoking crater, the camera pans tentatively over the edge to reveal not death, nor wreckage, but the illegible. It shows us nothing recognisable, nothing that can be read as either human or machine. The spectacle of the crash in *The Sound Barrier* is subsumed into the crater: it is a void, an abyss. At the bottom of this chasm, disturbingly revealed in a later floodlit shot, lies the inextricably enmeshed and compacted totality of Tony Garthwaite and Prometheus. In this second encounter with the crater, Lean poses the pregnant Sue on the edge of the abyss, the light glinting on her wedding ring. The sounds of the machinery and the harsh contrasts of darkness and light create an infernal vision.[60] It is a crude juxtaposition of life-generating femininity against death-dealing masculinity, but the more pertinent point is that Tony is not broken, or simply killed, he is annihilated by technology. Visually, this annihilatory absence speaks to the shifting meaning of technology in postwar modernity. The crater confronts both the spectator and the characters with the awful power of the

jet age and, as with the dawning of the atomic era, the human must adjust to the potential of technology not simply to damage but to obliterate.[61]

Illustration 2.7 Technological annihilation, *The Sound Barrier*

No Highway in the Sky played the anthropomorphic characteristics of aircraft for comedy, offering the succinct headline 'man kills aeroplane' to summarise Honey's defining action. *The Sound Barrier* returns, emphatically, to the more familiar configuration of aeroplane kills man, and it does so by suggesting not just individual jeopardy but an existential threat to the human agent. As the postwar period progressed, this sense of threat would become ever more potent; the scientist and his technology would increasingly be represented not as a means of reimagining male agency but as the most significant threat to its reconfiguration.

[1] The representation of the 'flawed flyer', evident in fiction, film and the theatre, is discussed in Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 145–52.

[2] Adrian Smith, 'The Dawn of the Jet Age in Austerity Britain: David Lean's *The Sound Barrier* (1952)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 30:4, 2010, 493; James Hamilton-Paterson, *Empire of the Clouds: When Britain's Aircraft Ruled the World*, London: Faber and Faber, 2010.

[3] Donald played a series of professional roles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and his performances encapsulated qualities of understatement, intelligence, irony and detachment valued in the war and immediate postwar years. His unusual stardom is discussed by Charles Barr, '"Madness, Madness!": The Brief Stardom of James Donald', in *British Stars and Stardom: From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery*, ed. Bruce Babington, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.

[4] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 173, 174.

[5] *The Wicked Lady* (1945), directed by Leslie Arliss, was a huge box-office success. The titular lady Barbara Skelton (Margaret Lockwood) steals her best friend's lover on the eve of her wedding but finds domesticity unspeakably dull. Her solutions include gambling, adultery, highway robbery and murder. It is a spectacularly camp performance of pleasure by Lockwood, and the character's agency sticks in the memory even after the brutal punishment she eventually receives.

[6] Critics are divided as to who in the end actually kills Bill. Harper and Porter's brief summary suggests Judy; Burton and O'Sullivan correctly attribute the crime to Bill's spurned French lover Marie – who then commits suicide. At the film's end, the middle-class domestic citizenship of Alan and Judy has been endorsed, while the corrupt, foreign residue of wartime, as embodied by Bill and Marie, has been consigned to the past.

[7] Flight was also integral to Ealing's *The Night My Number Came Up* (Leslie Norman, 1955), a film that toys with the supernatural as characters grapple with a premonition of disaster. Here, the test of masculinity is to overcome a fear of flying: as Raymond Durgnat notes, it is the parvenu businessman rather than the burnt-out former flyer who ultimately fails the test (*A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, London: Palgrave Macmillan/BFI, 2011, 30).

[8] John Fores, *The Springboard* (1956), London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960, 31.

[9] Smith, 'Dawn of the Jet Age', 494.

[10] David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (1991), London: Penguin, 2013, 161.

[11] Fores, *The Springboard*, 34.

[12] Ibid., 252.

[13] The aircraft listed as performers in the film are the Boeing Stratocruiser, Lockheed Constellation and Douglas DC6 (all

American) and the British Vickers Viscount. The publicity information pack for the film stresses the co-operation of 'all the major airlines', who 'seemed intensely proud to be members of the world's largest airport'. It also makes a virtue out of the absence of the de Havilland Comet, the first passenger jetliner and symbol of British technological ambition: 'The story … utilised the Comet, demonstrating its performance and amazing service operation. When these planes were grounded after the unfortunate crashes outside Rome, the script had to be quickly revised; B.O.A.C. immediately and unselfishly provided details on the American-built aircraft, the Constellation and the Stratocruiser … while B.E.A. provided the Viscount the wonderful reputation and performance of which is world-wide news today' (Eric Williams, 'No Trouble', Ealing Studios Information Folder, *Out of the Clouds*, British Film Institute). The Comet 1 was withdrawn from service after a series of deadly crashes, ultimately determined to be caused by metal fatigue, and its signifying absence is also mourned in *The Springboard*: 'It seemed too that it was only yesterday when the jet had been on the apron, proud and apart. There was no jet now, but she would come again … rebuilt in the light of the knowledge which had been gained so painfully from her ancestor' (111–12). The Comet did return but never fully recovered the ground it had lost to its competitors. A more realistic appraisal of Britain's postwar aviation industry – and of London Airport – is provided by Hamilton-Paterson's entertaining *Empire of the Clouds*. It is also worth noting that Ealing's general attitude towards America was rather less warm: Michael Balcon's desire to build a national cinema was based on significant anti-American sentiment (Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 59).

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[14] Michael Balcon used this feature to defend the film, which John Davis, managing director of Rank, was reluctant to support. Balcon

argued for ‘the advantages to be gained by dealing with a subject which has a unity of time and place and the particular advantage of the story actually taking place in the exact running time of the film’ (27 September 1955. Balcon papers, MEB H/135, British Film Institute).

[15] In actuality, a Bristol 170 Mk 31 freighter (MEB I/304a).

[16] Or, indeed, that enjoyed by ‘Prometheus’, the machine hero of David Lean’s *The Sound Barrier* (1952), discussed in the next section of the chapter.

[17] For Ealing’s documentary aesthetic and commitment to wartime propaganda, see Mark Duguid, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams (eds.), *Ealing Revisited*, London: BFI/Bloomsbury, 2019. The continuation of an ‘Ealing ethos’ into the 1950s, its problems and eventual redundancy are discussed by Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 57–73.

[18] Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 19.

[19] The dangers of the test pilot’s job were significant. Smith suggests some thirty-two pilots died in the first five years after the war (‘Dawn of the Jet Age’, 492), while the memoir of wartime fighter ace J. A. Kent, who spent a period as chief test pilot at Farnborough after the war, describes three deaths in quick succession testing the ‘Delta configuration’. Kent considered this ‘much too high’ a price for progress (*One of the Few*, London: William Kimber, 1971, 230–31).

[20] For a comprehensive account of the emergence of the 'organisation man' and his relationship to concepts of masculine toughness, rationality and emotional restraint, see Michael Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organisation Man since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. In the immediate postwar period, corporate masculinity and the loyalty it demanded might also be seen to have a shadow form in the shape of criminal organisations and the black market. This necessary other of capitalism generated an influential cycle of 'spiv' narratives in British cinema of the late 1940s.

[21] Alan Burton and Tim O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Cinema of Basil Dearden and Michael Relph*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 167.

[22] Ibid., 167. The other Dearden and Relph films identified by Burton and O'Sullivan as conforming to this pattern are: *The Ship That Died of Shame* (1955), *The League of Gentlemen* (1960) and *Man in the Moon* (1960). I am not entirely convinced that *Out of the Clouds* fits the template.

[23] Fores's abject relationship to a concept of risk is equally evident in his melodrama *No Mercy in the Sky* (1957). Humble salesman Edward Brindle, surviving a plane crash in the desert, sees a new world of adventure and desire – embodied in the orientalist fantasy of a beautiful young black woman – open before him, only for rescue to intervene and expose the horror of the domestic: 'the expectation of going back to Dawlish Close and all it contained, back to his train and office and his steady, security-rotted life, made Brindle sick with revulsion and a frightening intensity of impotent fury' (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957,

247). The book nonetheless insists that domesticity can and must be resumed.

[24] Fores, *The Springboard*, 137.

[25] Ibid., 181.

[26] Given how little acknowledgement or representation of the Holocaust appeared in fictions of the immediate postwar period, it is hard to know whether to applaud the film for acknowledging the death camps and recognising that survivors whose families had been murdered might be anxious or risk averse, or to condemn it for its astonishingly glib treatment of the matter. The advance publicity material for the film offers a series of synopses, none of which mention the characters' Jewish identities; William Whitebait in the *New Statesman* suggests that making the hero and heroine Jewish is an '(audacious touch!)'. Whitebait's brackets, along with Ealing's tactical omissions, suggest that not only the Holocaust but Jewish protagonists represented a box-office risk (*New Statesman*, 19 February 1955).

[27] Fores, *The Springboard*, 9.

[28] Ibid., 231.

[29] Prosthetic agency can be built on both masculine and feminine objects: as *No Highway* demonstrated, women and normative domesticity can function as the prosthesis enabling male agency.

[30] It has always been a perversity in constructions of national identity that women can symbolise the nation but they cannot be citizens of it. And in *Out of the Clouds* and *The Springboard*, the

aircraft similarly occupy this representational paradox. They both represent the modern nation and act as wilful feminine others that must be subordinated to the control of men.

[31] Fores, *The Springboard*, 24.

[32] Ibid., 171–72.

[33] The yearning for conventional gender roles and the centrality of flight to the plotting of masculinity in this period are underlined by *The Springboard*. Nick takes his son to the airport for a pleasure flight, and the boy's vital, formative first experience is almost destroyed by the horrific realisation that the pilot is a woman (131).

[34] Nevil Shute, *Slide Rule: The Autobiography of an Engineer*, London: Heinemann, 1954, 69.

[35] Durgnat, *A Mirror for England*, 249. Durgnat, it should be noted, damned Lean's Romanticism as 'forlorn', characterised by 'the absence of all those feelings which no-one even dreamed of feeling' (250). Melanie Williams, drawing on the anthropology of Ruth Benedict, sees a tension between 'Apollonian progress' and 'Dionysian abandon' in this and Lean's other narratives of visionary men *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) (*David Lean*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, 133–35).

[36] Geoff Mayer, *Roy Ward Baker*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, 81–84.

[37] Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (1990), London: Routledge, 1992, 47.

[38] Ben Shephard offers a shocking comparison: the 'attrition rates in the bomber fleets was appalling: life expectancy compared unfavourably to that on the Western Front in 1916' (*A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914–1994* (2000), London: Pimlico, 2002, 283). Presentism was a necessary coping strategy, but fictional representations suggest its limits. In Roald Dahl's short story 'Death of an Old Old Man', a pilot who has survived four years of combat becomes terrified at the very point at which the prospect of victory emerges: 'It is always fine to fight when you are going to lose everything anyway, and that was how it was four years ago. But now we're going to win. It is so different when you are going to win. If I die now I lose fifty years of life, and I don't want to lose that' (*Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* (1946), London: Penguin, 2010, 13). Yet, surviving, too, presents problems, from the traumatic to the prosaic. In Nigel Balchin's *Mine Own Executioner* (1945), Adam Lucien brings the war back with him, destroying the domestic space; in Agatha Christie's *4.50 from Paddington* (1957), former pilot Brian, unable to cope with the quotidian demands of living, has regressed to childhood and is being fathered by his own son.

[39] Smith, 'Dawn of the Jet Age', 492.

[40] Williams, *David Lean*, 139.

[41] Ibid., 143.

[42] Scientific enquiry, like the aeroplane, is something of a hermaphrodite – figured as rational and masculine when under

control; feminine, irrational and other when it exceeds the parameters of knowledge, or questions the received wisdom of the patriarchal symbolic. Ironically, both the urge to stay grounded and the siren song of science are linked to a feminine irrationality that must be tamed by the rational male agent. In a curious tonal overlap, Arnold's music also approximates the music that accompanies Sammy Rice's encounters with the mystical pull of the whisky bottle in *The Small Back Room*.

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[43] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, London: Routledge, 1992, 53.

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[44] Ibid., 63.

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[45] The distinction between the two men is made explicit later in the film by the chief designer Will: 'Tony hasn't got it up here … that's what a pilot needs nowadays, brains and imagination'.

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[46] Kevin Brownlow, *David Lean: A Biography*, London: Richard Cohen Books, 1996, 283.

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[47] In this, *The Sound Barrier* can be seen as one of a loose grouping of films that seek epic landscapes against which to test the human and attempt a reconstruction of masculinity, while simultaneously paying homage to what had gone before. *Scott of the Antarctic* is exemplary of this tradition in its combination of quest, competition and cultural mourning, while a film such as Ealing's *The Overlanders* (1946) uses the Australian outback to construct a hybrid war–Western. Although set in wartime, there are no representations of the enemy – rather, the challenge is to overcome 'nature', through the impossible task of driving cattle across the Northern territories. The film is perhaps most interesting, though, for its negotiation of female postwar agency.

Mary, the central female character, is equal to the other male drovers – indeed, she can stop a stampede – but her final appearance is as a child, resting her head on the protective breast of her mother. For extended discussion of *Scott of the Antarctic*, see Martin Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender and History* 19:1, 2007, 163–85; Gill Plain, *John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 112–23.

[48] Discussed by Williams, *David Lean*, 143.

[49] Both *Out of the Clouds* and *The Springboard* indicate just how novel recreational flight remained. In the film, flight is a luxurious mode of travel requiring mediation by highly trained staff; in the book, the airport is presented as a location for a family day out, where ordinary people come to witness the spectacle of a mode of travel not yet within their grasp (Fores, *The Springboard*, 129–30).

[50] Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Everest on 29 May 1953; Roger Bannister's sub-four-minute mile was completed on 6 May 1954. Smith stresses the period's 'unqualified belief in the power of new technology' and the film's relationship to a 'remarkable moment of optimism in early postwar Britain, the Coronation marking a high water mark of invented tradition *and* modernity' ('Dawn of the Jet Age', 507).

[51] Spicer, *Typical Men*, 56.

[52] Although RAF aircrew enjoyed proximity to women during the war, with wives and girlfriends often housed in the vicinity of bases, the hierarchy was clear. Women's desires and domestic needs were subordinate both to military requirements and the

needs of the male group. In the postwar period, the domestic becomes a more problematic force for men to negotiate.

[53] The sound barrier was officially broken by Chuck Yeager of the USAF on 14 October 1947. The first British pilot to break the barrier was John Derry, an ex-RAF pilot working for de Havilland, on 6 September 1948 (Brownlow, *David Lean*, 295, 763). Derry was the first man to break the barrier in a pure jet (Hamilton-Paterson, *Empire of the Clouds*, 11).

[54] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 179.

[55] Spicer, *Typical Men*, 56.

[56] Gordon Beckles, *Birth of a Spitfire!*, London: Collins, 1941, 10.

[57] The opening page of the book makes its target audience clear:

‘This George here,’ explained the Squadron Leader to me, indicating the Flight Lieutenant, ‘is one of those glamour boys from over the way who fly Spitfires. They have fans just like Gary Cooper and Ginger Rogers. Write letters back to the people who paid for their Spitfires. You know the sort of thing? “Dear Girls. Thanks for your sweet little note. Last Sunday afternoon, while thinking of you, I brought down eleven and a quarter Messerschmitts in your Spitfire.”’ (Beckles, *Spitfire!*, 7–8)

A more intimate anthropology of the Spitfire emerges from RAF memoirs. In Colin Hodgkinson’s *Best Foot Forward*, the Spitfire itself is feminised, becoming a thing of beauty with ‘a mysterious authority’ that inspires chivalry. While other aircraft, however good, had to be ‘wrenched about the sky’, the Spitfire ‘*flew*’. ‘It was more than an aircraft,’ he concludes, ‘it was a symbol, and I,

for one, regarded it with that awe which is not far removed from tenderness' (London: Odhams Press, 1957, 164).

[58] In Dahl's 'Someone Like You', a pilot observes 'I keep thinking during a raid … just as we're going to release some bombs, I keep thinking to myself, shall I just jink a little … whom shall I kill tonight' (*Over to You*, 152). In Dahl's imagination, by the end of the war, the pilot and aeroplane encapsulate the OED's definition of a cyborg: 'extended beyond normal human limitations', they represent an 'integrated man-machine system'. An alternative metaphor of horse and rider, discussed by Edgerton, animates the machine rather than technologising the human (*England and the Aeroplane*, 81–83).

[59] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), London: Vintage, 1993, 72.

[60] The visual depiction of hell consolidates the film's ethical debate, in which Sue and JR argue over his 'evil' vision. That science also offers the ambivalent temptations of power is evident in Will's description of JR as a 'vile seducer' who persuades him to return to the struggle for domination of the air.

[61] This is equally the emphasis of Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* (1979), a potent Regan-era mythologising of American masculinity in the 1950s. After each test pilot's death, Wolfe repeats the phrase 'burned beyond recognition' as shorthand for jet power-induced death. In the case of a pilot who ejected at high altitude and whose parachute failed to open, however, the imagery further effaces the human: '[the shape] became much bigger and hurtled toward them at terrific speed, until they couldn't make out its actual outlines at all. Finally there was just a streaking black blur before their eyes, followed by what seemed like an explosion.

Except that it was not an explosion; it was the tremendous *crack* of Ted Whelan, his helmet, his pressure suit, and his seat-parachute rig smashing into the centre of the runway, precisely on target … When they lifted his body up off the concrete, it was like a sack of fertilizer' (London: Picador, 1990, 19).

Chapter 3

Bad Science

Nigel Balchin and the Limits of Technological Man-Making

◈

> Science has occupied a profoundly ambivalent position with regard to film and popular culture in the 20th century. A fascination with its promise and heroic powers have uneasily coexisted with images of its menace and potential for destruction, disaster and terminal doom.[1]

> ‘The man of science, Madame, is not the cool, calm individual he is made out to be in fiction. In fact … between a first-class tennis player, an operatic prima-donna and a nuclear physicist there is really very little difference as far as emotional instability goes.’[2]

While technology, in the form of hardware, has excellent prosthetic man-making qualities, science, in the form of brains, has a rather less impressive track record. The fiction of the 1940s and 1950s

suggests that the pursuit of science actively disempowers men, rendering them feminised and passive, and positioning their knowledge not as a source of individual agency but as a commodity to be managed, purchased or otherwise controlled. When scientists attempt to take action, they are represented as mad, bad or naïve, acting – and mobilising the threat of their perversely powerful scientific know-how – under the malign influence of politics, religion or ethics. A brief survey of scientific representation reveals variations on this theme.[3] In Nigel Balchin's *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), foolish young biologist Bob Marriott is led astray by reckless talk of international responsibility and scientific influence, but proves no match for the anarchic guile of an embittered Irish veteran.[4] Roy Boulting's *Seven Days to Noon* (1950) similarly presents the scientist as dangerously naïve. The faith in his work that once drove esteemed nuclear physicist Professor Willingdon has been replaced by ethical doubt and a religious mania that convinces him he can save the world by blowing up London. The scientists of Agatha Christie's *Destination Unknown* (1954), by contrast, seem devoid of ethical awareness, occupying a full range of unpalatable ideological positions from Communism to Fascism to an extreme intellectual nihilism. Fortunately for the world, Christie's 'prima donnas' are removed from circulation to a state of luxury captivity, in a plot that ultimately proves to be less about science than capital. Brains are commodities, and someone wants to corner the market. The scientist as a commodity, to be traded or forcibly acquired, recurs in more ideologically freighted fashion as Cold War tensions progress.[5] By the time of Alastair MacLean's *The Last Frontier* (1959), scientist Dr Jennings is little more than a parcel passed between east and west. Jennings is no fool, but he is old and vulnerable. A pawn between superpowers, he can only offer passive resistance and await rescue through the prosthetic agency of youth. Between these direct representations lies the scientist as causality. Scientific manipulation of biomatter lurks, ill-defined, behind the malevolent perambulating plants of John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and scientific product – the atomic bomb – destroys the

world, scientists and all, in Nevil Shute's devastating elegy *On the Beach* (1957). Shute's vision of apocalypse indicts political lunacy as much as anything, but the scientists who remain in his dying world are utterly impotent. John Osborne, seconded to the submarine mapping the contours of the surviving world, can only measure radiation – he cannot stop it. For much of the book, he clings to his belief in the value of 'just finding out', but, in the end, he seeks agency (and consolation) through that most conventional of prosthetic means: driving a Ferrari around a racetrack.[6]

These examples suggest that behind the veneer of excitement that elevated technocratic inventors to heroic status in films such as *The Sound Barrier* and *The Net* (1953), 'science' is at best a compromised and ambivalent form of man-making, dependent upon a surprisingly nuanced understanding of difference.[7] In other words, while some disciplines are compatible with masculinity, others actively disempower, rendering their practitioners feminised and untrustworthy. A not entirely frivolous graph could be sketched mapping scientific occupation against masculinity, and the point of optimum intersection would be the geologist: the man who studies rocks, usually in a hard place. This is the modern masculinity beloved of Innes and Alistair MacLean, men doing work in the discipline of a science based on empirical observation and reliable fact. On this putative scale, medical doctors might also achieve positive masculinity, along with meteorologists, engineers and marine biologists. The more applied the science, and the more dangerous the environment in which it is enacted, the better its man-making properties. Non-specific PhDs, mathematicians, theoretical physicists and men with microscopes all risk collapsing into the negative. The contours of their work are too abstract for easy representation, while the application of their work – in biological or nuclear warfare – is too extreme to be left in the hands of men who cannot speak a language accessible to the 'common man'.

This scientific hierarchy is inextricably linked to potent and long-standing conceptions of national identity, which in turn cannot be

divorced from ideals of manliness. Ernest Barker's massive postwar anthology, *The Character of England* (1947), provides useful context. In chapters ranging from religion, government and industry to humour, the press and outdoor life, a series of writers and public figures attempt to 'describe the spirit of England'.[8] The results emphasise history and tradition and they reiterate the assumption, deployed extensively by Second World War propaganda, of English moderation and good humour. The project as a whole is riven with a distrust of complexity and cleverness. Basil Willey, writing in 'Thought', concludes: 'Our divines, philosophers and moralists may lack the daring, the scope and the grandeur to be found elsewhere; we have produced no Calvin, no Leibnitz, no Kant, no Hegel. Our peaks are lower than the Alps.'[9] This topographical metaphor is typical of habits of thought that figure the Englishman (sic) as a product of soil and climate. Geography has shaped him as insular, independent, sturdy, prosaic, distrustful of extremes. The emphasis on moderation similarly permeates James Sutherland's literature chapter. The English enjoy a joke 'to lighten the burden' of seriousness, prefer their tragedy mixed with comedy and like their prose to be an organic, natural representation of life. 'Equally suspect and "un-English"', writes Sutherland, 'is the writer who shows anything more than a tepid interest in form and structure'.[10] Sutherland's conservatism is also a statement of the ethical duty of the writer, and he concludes with a polite reproach to modern experimental writers who have left their readers 'stumbling in some uncertainty behind them': 'Do they always recognize the immense responsibility that their unusual perception and their powers of expression have placed upon them, at a time when the need to order and illuminate human experience is so pressing, and when science has outstripped both wisdom and humanity?'[11] If literature has, metaphorically, deserted its post, science has been guilty of something much more serious; but readers hoping that the science chapter might offer an answer to accusations of inhumanity would have been disappointed. Although C. P. Snow would later call

scientists the people with 'the future in their bones', Sir William Cecil Dampier looks backwards rather than forwards, as if to admit that the national identity of scientific endeavour becomes ever harder to conceive.[12] Dampier – historian of science, Fellow of the Royal Society, expert in everything from ions to agriculture – sets about the narration of an England versus the Continent relay race, with the baton of science passing between the 'practical' English, the 'logical' French and the 'metaphysical' Germans.[13] Although opening with the assertion that there is 'no specifically English science', he nonetheless proceeds to draw a series of distinctions, culminating in the claim that 'England had learned to isolate and study distinct problems, and had a happy knack of getting to the bottom of some of them'.[14] Again, the language is telling. It is not learning or intellect that profits the English scientist but rather a 'happy knack' – something closer to luck – a sort of intellectual manual dexterity that is clearly distinct from abstract theorising. You can rely on English science to get the lid off the gherkin jar. However absurd, this succinct characterisation exposes the impossibility of the modern scientific hero: no one easily gets to the bottom of quantum mechanics, a science characterised by uncertainty. Worse still, when distilled into practical application, it threatens apocalyptic destruction. Dampier, at the age of eighty, concludes with breezy optimism that the problems presented by atomic energy will 'doubtless' be solved – a confidence that even the most gung-ho of popular fictions might have considered misplaced.[15]

The British distrust of brains, abstraction and philosophy is long-standing and pervasive, as is its preference for an 'amateur' ethos. Barker's collection implicitly mourns the disappearance of an intellectual tradition in which gentlemen quietly innovate in their spare time. This ambivalence concerning the new age of the expert professional was not confined to scientific or literary elites. Although the immediate postwar period saw the stock of the meritocratic civilian professional briefly rise to heroic levels, the phenomenon was short-lived, and films such as *Doctor in the House* (1954) opted

instead for a 'comic mode that deliberately punctures the pomposity and saintliness of the medical profession'.[16] The inoffensive consensual middle-class mishaps typical of the *Doctor* films, and the many other light-hearted romantic comedies that triumphed at the 1950s box office, are indicative of the extent to which Britain in the 1950s was still permeated by deep-rooted structures of conventionality. Films of the period, as Christine Geraghty has persuasively argued, 'demonstrated a blithe resistance to change, a comic affection for tradition and a sceptical attitude to modernist claims about social and technological transformation'.[17] Indeed, in its reassuring recourse to the known and familiar, Geraghty concludes, cinema gave audiences 'a rest from the stress of being citizens in the grip of modernisation'.[18] This is a telling image, and a sense of modernity as incomprehensible, threatening and burdensome permeates fiction of the period, co-existing uneasily with the excitement and optimism generated by jet age fantasies and 'New Elizabethan' achievement.

Modern scientific cultures were fairly rapidly characterised as 'other', a site of disquiet and a cause for concern not just for the general public but also for the vectors of traditional 'authority'. This conflict is central to C. P. Snow's *The New Men* (1954), a novel charting British attempts to develop an atomic bomb. Although the book is about the world of science, it is narrated by a civil servant – the perpetual observer Lewis Eliot – and it rehearses many of the arguments and attitudes that would later be enshrined in Snow's 'The Two Cultures' lecture, in particular the lack of a common language and a common (national) community. In the aftermath of Hiroshima, a leak is detected at the British atomic research facility and an intelligence officer, Captain Smith, dispatched to investigate. As interrogations progress, Snow's authorial voice observes: '[the scientists] thought that Smith was a fool. They were quite wrong; he was highly intelligent, and very far, much further than many of the scientists, from being a commonplace man. The trouble was, he did not speak their language'.[19] The need for some form of translation

or mediation is repeated with variations as the novel progresses but finds perhaps its most telling articulation in the words of Edgar Hankins, a literary journalist and rare voice from outside the claustrophobic environs of research station and government office. Nuclear scientists, concludes Hankins, are 'the new foreigners': '[He] had come to think of them as a different race'.[20] There is here a disturbing process of othering. If translation fails, the scientist becomes foreign, unfamiliar, alien, anti-social. He or she is a new form of fifth columnist, distanced by their extreme abstraction from the prosaic belonging of quotidian life, and – worse still – loyal not to home and nation but to the nebulous internationalism of the scientific 'community'.[21]

The otherness of the scientist is figured across a spectrum from a failure to grow up to the alterity of old age. At one extreme, the scientist is socially immature, a boy playing with his toys, which might be anything from lab equipment to ideology. Indeed, scientists are often linked with radical political tendencies – in particular Communism – as a sign of this immaturity. Again, though, there are crucial distinctions between types of scientists, and the more proximate the figure is to the intellectual, the more likely he is to manifest as alien. Tony Shaw, writing on Cold War cinema of the early 1950s, observes the industry's preference for casting 'stock-in-trade intellectuals' as traitors and subversives,[22] while Snow draws attention to the 'rift in technical society' between scientists and engineers. Engineers make things and are indifferent to politics, whereas physicists are 'rebellious, questioning, protestant, curious for the future and unable to resist shaping it. The engineers buckled to their jobs and gave no trouble, in America, in Russia, in Germany; it was not from them, but from the scientists, that came heretics, forerunners, martyrs, traitors'.[23]

Scientists are extremists; British heroes are not. Snow's novel, with its characters caught between disciplinary and family loyalties, argues inevitably for the merits of a paternalistic moderation. When scientists grow up and achieve a mature ideological position, when

they recognise the value of the conservative state and political consensus, then and only then will they attain authority.[24]

Although wisdom proverbially comes with age, age itself seldom benefits the scientist of the 1950s, who is as likely to be experiencing a second childhood as attaining cultural authority. With age comes a loss of *physical* power and courage, 'the one virtue', according to Snow, which all men, even scientists, 'uncritically' admire.[25] MacLean's *The Last Frontier* confronts this dilemma in the defection of British scientist Dr Jennings, whose compliance has been bought by a combination of Soviet threats to his family and a naïve belief that he is working for peace.[26] Over the course of the novel, the elderly Jennings will achieve a belated maturity and recognise the error of his ways, but however resilient he becomes, he is powerless to escape his Communist captors. For this, he needs a substantial masculine prosthesis: secret agent Michael Reynolds, a young active body that can protect and enable him. As if to emphasise his prosthetic subjectivity, Reynolds is figured in astonishingly mechanistic terms, as when the daughter of Hungarian resistance leader Jansci accuses him of being 'inhuman':[27]

> 'The Count says you're only a machine, a mechanism designed to carry out a certain piece of work, but without any life or existence as an individual. He says you're about the only person he knows who cannot be afraid, and he is afraid of people who cannot be afraid.
>
> … Jansci says the same. He says you're neither moral nor immoral, just amoral, with certain conditioned pro-British, anti-Communist reactions that are valueless in themselves. He says whether you kill or not is decided not on the basis of wrong or right but simply of expediency.'[28]

Reynolds is condemned for being too much of a machine. His carapace of masculine competence is so firm that he risks becoming

an automaton, and an example of weaponised masculinity. He encapsulates ongoing anxieties concerning residual wartime masculinities – he is a trained killer evoking a lineage stretching back to the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and beyond – even as he anticipates a fictional type that would grow in prominence through the remainder of the twentieth century. Reynolds foreshadows the affectless masculinity of super spies, mercenaries, contract killers and, ultimately, the hyper-professional serial killer of a type epitomised by Hannibal Lecter. If, as earlier chapters have suggested, some form of symbiosis with the machine can help, literally or imaginatively, to reconfigure the uncertain postwar male, too great an embodiment of the mechanical results in monstrosity. MacLean's novel consequently dedicates itself as much to the re-education of Reynolds as to Jennings. The old man must toughen up, while the young man must acquire an appropriate sensibility. Reynolds is thus an unusual version of cadet masculinity: already functionally competent in such key indices of masculinity as courage, endurance and initiative, he must grow up to understand the sorrows of man and the complexity of international politics. Lest the dangers of dehumanisation not be clear enough from the many lectures on human suffering directed towards Reynolds, MacLean throws in a final warning from science: a hospital commandant who experiments on his prisoners:

> There was something evil, something abnormally wrong and inhuman about the quiet-talking commandant with the gently humorous professorial talk, all the more evil, all the more inhuman because it was deliberately neither, just the chillingly massive indifference of one whose utter and all-exclusive absorption in an insatiable desire for the furthering of this own particular life's work left no possible room for any mere consideration of humanity.'[29]

While clearly designed to evoke memories of Nazi concentration camps, the terms in which the commandant is condemned form a continuum with the anxieties surrounding scientists in the work of

writers from Snow to Christie. The scientist cares only about the efficiency and integrity of the experiment; egotistical, selfish, solipsistic, he is abstracted to the point of inhumanity.

The fear that science dehumanises, depriving its habitués of what might be termed social masculinity, contributes to the growth in the 1950s of apocalyptic fictions: films and novels that, through a catastrophic event, restart the clock of human development. Technology is wiped out; men are thrown back on the basics of man-making: the survival skills of physical masculinity. The metaphor of breadwinning, so potent in analyses of 1950s domestic citizenship, ceases to function as metaphor. The man who cannot hunt cannot survive. Nowhere is this more evident than in John Wyndham's classic construction of a de-technologised world *The Day of the Triffids* (1951). With the vast majority of humanity blinded by exposure to an inexplicable meteor shower, civilisation grinds to a halt and finds itself at the mercy of the triffids – mobile carnivorous plants, of unknown origin, that have been chained down and farmed for their oil. The novel's sighted hero, Bill Masen, achieves agency not just through the good fortune of vision but also through his prosaic competence and the satisfactions of independence:

> All the old problems, the stale ones, both personal and general, had been solved by one mighty slash. Heaven alone knew as yet what others might arise … but they would be *new*. I was emerging as my own master, and no longer a cog. It might well be a world full of horrors and dangers that I should have to face, but I could take my own steps to deal with it – I would no longer be shoved hither and thither by forces and interests that I neither understood nor cared about.[30]

As the world around him becomes increasingly brutal, Bill sets out on a quest to rescue his soul mate Josella and destroy every triffid that stands in his way. In a return to pre-industrial social formations, he builds an enclave, a self-sufficient farm protected through a rigorous policy of flame-throwing. He becomes, in Josella's mocking

terms, ‘a knight-errant … [keeping] the dragons away’.[31] But for all its tropes of questing man-making, the book does not imagine that a return to Eden – or a pre-industrial utopia – is either possible or desirable. Having purged a decadent civilisation, in what is intermittently figured as nature’s revenge, the book insists that science will be needed both to find a permanent solution to the triffids and to build a better new world.[32] In the book’s conclusion, the tattered remains of human civilisation have fragmented into pseudo-fascist paramilitary organisations, fortified feudal communities and an embryonic society seeking to ‘build something new and better’.[33] Wiping out modernity has its advantages, but going ‘back to basics’ seems also to ensure the triumph of conventional gender ideology. In science fiction, as in postwar pronatalist policy, rebuilding society depends upon the return of the ‘modern’ woman to a fundamentally procreative role.

Although *The Day of the Triffids* remains Wyndham’s best-known work, it was not his last word on the topic of catastrophic social breakdown. He returned to the subject two years later in a novel that both revisits the preoccupations of the triffids and significantly reconfigures them. What happens to Britain, and the world, in *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) is every bit as grim as in Wyndham’s earlier dystopian vision, but the structure of the narrative and its curious tonal refusal of seriousness combine to produce a very different book, and a very different vision of postwar masculinity.

‘The Boffin’s Lament’: John Wyndham, Science and Satire

Oh, I’m burning my brains in the backroom,
Almost setting my cortex alight
To find a new thing to go crack-boom!

And blow up a xenobathite.

Oh, I've pondered the nuclear thermals
And every conceivable ray.
I've mugged up on technical journals,
And now I'm just starting to pray.[34]

'The Boffin's Lament' appears midway through *The Kraken Wakes* and is composed by a bored sound engineer, stuck on a small Caribbean island, awaiting the possibility of an attack by an unseen alien force that has taken up residence in the deepest areas of the oceans. Able to exist at a level of pressure far beyond human tolerance, and possessed of capabilities exceeding scientific comprehension, the 'bathies' have defeated all efforts to understand, control or defeat them – a situation that the ditty makes clear. Only one figure has shown any comprehension of the situation and the scale of the threat it poses to civilisation, the scientist Dr Alastair Bocker, who has organised an expedition in the hope of seeing the aliens in action. After a long wait, in which the book's first-person narrator, broadcast journalist Mike Watson, consumes gin slings with his scriptwriter wife Phyllis, the bathies duly turn up and annihilate the island's main town. It is the narrative's first direct encounter. Out of the sea come huge pustule-exuding sea tanks that burst into sticky cilia which capture and kill any humans they detect. Caught like 'flies on a fly-paper', characters are dragged and rolled into gluey balls of the dead and dying; a man simultaneously ensnared by two powerful tentacles is simply torn in half (141). It is a scene of carnage which many, including the song's composer, do not survive. Taking place midway through the novel, this brief battle is a shocking moment of violence within a narrative that has been, up to this point, a largely speculative comedy of manners examining Western culture's limited ability to engage with the inexplicable. The events might consequently have been expected to usher in a change of pace – some urgency in the nation's response to threat – but instead, quite the opposite occurs. In keeping with Wyndham's

satirical approach, the battle of Smithtown causes barely a ripple in the pond of hubristic British insularity. Rather, with devastating complacency, a noisy cheerleader of the popular press announces itself 'confident that scientific research will before long find a means to restore the freedom of the seas' (149). There is no need to fortify the coast, the paper continues, because to do so would be to succumb to scaremongering. This attack, it argues, took place in the tropics among colonial subjects foolish enough to reside on vulnerable islands. The unfortunate dead – scarcely more than 'the number of persons injured on the road in a few days' – are of little concern to the UK taxpayer and far removed from the priorities, and vested interests, of 'world trade' (149–50). With this blithe xenophobic dismissal, what should have been the long-awaited empirical proof of alien invasion and a fundamental threat to global security is, in short order, dismissed as the alarmist fantasy of a lunatic scientist.

Once again, the problem for science is communication. Dr Bocker, who figures himself as 'Cassandra' (107), pops up at regular intervals throughout the novel, and is repeatedly undone by his inability to speak strategically. He is rather a man with 'a gift for being right at the wrong time, and in the wrong manner' (181). He insists on complexity and scientific integrity when far cruder messaging is required. He also, in the early stages of the novel, makes the mistake of suggesting peaceful communication with the alien 'other', recognising from the outset that this colonising force has capabilities well beyond those of humanity (47, 107). In this novel, no one listens to science, unless it speaks in terms of the already familiar. A telling example is provided by the inexplicable and rapid sinking of a Japanese liner. First mediated through the melodrama of human interest, supplemented by the assumption that only the West can build a decent ship (74), the story then becomes a mystery endlessly paralleled with the *Marie Celeste* (76–77), before, finally, a convenient scientific answer is proposed: metal fatigue. In an inversion of Nevil Shute's *No Highway*, where Dr Honey battled to convince his employers of the real and imminent

danger of metal fatigue in aircraft, the world now clings to the concept like a life-raft.[35] At last, a plausible solution to the problem of inexplicable technological catastrophe has been proposed. Mike provides a cynical summary:

> 'Ah! The blinding light of science,' I said after reading several closely similar versions in different papers. 'A bit hard on that shipyard, and not, perhaps very consoling to the relatives, but a pretty piece of work all the same. So reassuring for all the rest of us. Observe the nicer points: not just general metal-fatigue, nor even weld-fatigue … no, just the fatigue of an unspecified alloy or two used in *one Japanese* ship. … And the sea …? Nothing to do with it. The sea is as safe as ever it was.'[36]

Science, in this scenario, enables a mass avoidance of the threats facing humanity. Blind faith in its potency inhibits social change and government action and, for all its supposed authority, it does not enable masculine agency. Everyone waits for the backroom boys to come up with an answer, but they spend the novel stuck in their backrooms, unable to provide solutions, man-making or otherwise (159, 205). In addition, existing technology seems worse than useless. Attempts to attack the bathies with 'the more regular type of atomic bombs' – a phrase that quietly indicts the normalised status of a technology still barely understood – only succeed in poisoning the seas, which in turn begins to threaten food supplies (56). By the end of *The Kraken Wakes*, the polar icecaps have melted, icebergs are floating around the Cornish coast and most of England is under water.[37] Mike and Phyllis are living on an island in Cornwall, cut off from contact with the remnants of the known world. In the final pages, a glimmer of hope appears – naturally, in the form of the ever-resilient scientific jack-in-the-box Dr Bocker – and they prepare to sail back to London to begin the work of reconstruction. The final message is one of reassurance, faintly echoing the rhetoric of postwar reconstruction: 'we've been here before', says Phyllis, and 'we got through last time' (238).

There has been to date very little criticism of Wyndham, perhaps on account of Brian Aldiss's damning contention that he is the 'master of the cosy catastrophe'.[38] It is not difficult to see the grounds for the accusation. A cry of 'we can rebuild' from a middle-class couple who have survived the worst by hunkering down in their well-equipped cottage castle begs significant questions about who lives, who dies, who matters and how they might be governed in the emergent new society. At the same time, there is nothing 'cosy' about a world reduced to a fifth of its former population, nor in the sheer number of sea passengers and coast dwellers who die in *The Kraken Wakes*. In the light of this combination of rupture and reassurance, it is worth considering the novel in a different light. *The Kraken* is, in many respects, more closely related to crime fiction than to either apocalyptic literature or the world-building project of science fiction. In the classic formula of interwar detection, the stability of a known and ordered world is threatened by the violation of murder. Disturbingly, investigation of this crime reveals not that it was some sort of aberration by an obvious criminal other but rather that it was committed by one of the respectable middle-class citizens who make up the community. Worse still, it turns out that pretty much everyone in the community was guilty in thought, if not in deed. As any novel by Agatha Christie insists, everyone has a motive and most have the inclination. It is only lack of opportunity or nerve that prevents the victim from being murdered several times over. These fictions, also misleadingly dubbed cosy, end with the identification of a criminal scapegoat and the restoration of order, usually symbolised through marriage. Yet, all the heteronormativity in the world cannot disguise the fact that a fundamentally corrupt and venal society has been revealed. Much the same can be said of Wyndham's civilised middle-class ambience and the crumbs of comfort he scatters among the ashes of apocalypse. *The Kraken*'s cosiness – its village England domesticity, Coward-esque dialogue and lightness of touch – disguises a potent critique of socio-political norms and their cultural mediation.[39] When the insouciant investigators, Mike and Phyllis, attempt to solve the mystery of the

oceans, they find instead complacency, denial and the abdication of responsibility. They also find a disturbing – and utterly misplaced – reliance on self-congratulatory national narratives of wartime survival.

Britain survived the war on a heady, if paradoxical, propaganda mix of underdog mythology and a deep-rooted belief in inherent national superiority. The nation also coped through an ability to accept radically changed circumstances as normal. The iconography of the Blitz is replete with milkmen making deliveries to bombed streets and sleepers making themselves at home in Tube stations. Yet, this once admirable acquiescence proves central to the incremental triumph of the bathies and, indeed, to the success of the triffids in Wyndham's earlier novel. As Alice Ferrebe argues, it is the 'staying power of normality' that brings about the nation's downfall. Accepting the triffids as part of the landscape results in their 'easy, invidious and purely domestic' invasion. The 'casual assimilation' of quaint but inexplicable plants is the thin end of the wedge of national passivity.[40] It is easier to adjust to change than to question its provenance or take action to address its implications, and in *The Kraken Wakes*, Wyndham depicts a Britain so skilled in the art of normalising that it fails to notice the incremental destruction of the world.[41] After initial distress, the British simply absorb disasters, rationalising them into a redundant cold war worldview. As an international conference designed to address the threat to the world's oceans collapses into traditional East–West animosities, Mike wryly observes that this 'action, with its reassuring ring of normality, exerted a valuable tranquillizing influence' (106).

Yet, at the same time as *The Kraken Wakes* exposes the dangers of normalising, it also does something very different with its configuration of threat. *The Kraken* ends where *Triffids* began, with roving bands fighting for resources, independent states forming on high ground and guns as essential survival equipment. But this similarity only goes so far. The leisurely pace of the world's inundation generates a very different mode of jeopardy. Mike and Phyllis find a series of secure spaces which they can inhabit, and

they experience little personal threat. Phyllis, unlike Josella, is never seriously at risk of capture, enslavement or rape. This is a notable contrast and has significant implications for the novel's negotiation of postwar subjectivities. Indeed, while Wyndham has, once again, brought Britain to the edge of annihilation, *The Kraken Wakes* seems determined to rewrite the narrative of post-apocalyptic masculine agency established in *The Day of the Triffids*.

Dystopian writing of the 1950s was not kind to women, and *The Day of the Triffids* was not the only book of the period to imagine that socio-political breakdown will lead inexorably (or rapidly) to their disenfranchisement and violation. John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956), for example, offers a chilling assertion of women's subordinate position. A virus has wiped out the grains fundamental to global food supplies and the world is starving; this Kraken-like destruction of natural resources prompts a Triffid-esque breakdown in the social order, and Christopher is far more uncompromising than Wyndham when it comes to the depiction of the physical and psychic violence needed for survival. With London set to be destroyed by a strategic nuclear strike – the government's solution to the problem of too many mouths to feed – the novel charts the journey of a family to what they hope will be the food security of a potato-based Westmorland valley. In the process, the novel categorically makes a man of its central figure John Custance, who, within a couple of days of escaping London, evolves from a quotidian engineer into the feudal leader of a subservient band. His wife is shocked by the change; his children are frightened of his authority; no one questions his word, which includes his acquiescence in his chief lieutenant's murder of one wife and forced adoption of a second.[42] Narratives such as *The Death of Grass* and *The Day of the Triffids* generate an acute awareness of the precarity of women's position and the limits of their progress in the twenty-five years since universal suffrage; they also speak to postwar pronatalism and to the repeated narrative insistence that women not only belong in the home, they like it there. Belief in women's essential connection to domesticity pervades the period,

transcending representations of the dystopian present to contaminate imagined futures as well. It is a critical commonplace that science fiction is as much about the present as the future: new worlds will inevitably be constrained by the limits of contemporary imagination.[43] Thus, in Wyndham's short story collection *The Seeds of Time* (1956), the various fantastical futures assume that women do not belong in space and would rather clean their own houses than have a robot do it for them. In 'Opposite Number', all scientists are men and women are 'unemployed wives', while in 'Time to Rest', the colonisation of space is purely man's business, which means that when the earth splits apart, only two human women remain. The competition for this resource is so extreme, and the women themselves become so depraved, that murder is the only solution: 'Things were quieter after that; with drinking as the main amusement.'[44] 'Survival' similarly assumes that women belong in the suburbs rather than space, but in this case, the tables are turned on those who imagine the quiet young woman foolishly accompanying her husband to Mars will be the first to 'go under' when things go wrong.[45] Instead, with the ship stranded in space, the story hinges on a different gendered assumption: that the female of the species is not only deadlier than the male but will go to any lengths to protect its children.[46] This is not to indict Wyndham for a failure of imagination – the gender assumptions of *The Seeds of Time* would continue to permeate popular science fiction for decades to come – but rather to give context to perhaps the most remarkable feature of *The Kraken Wakes*: namely, its divergence from these norms and from the conventions of prosthetic man-making.

In *The Kraken Wakes*, few of the dominant 1950s assumptions about male and female roles apply. Phyllis shows no interest in curtains, while Mike shows little enthusiasm for the prosthetic accoutrements of post-apocalyptic masculinity. Significantly, Mike is not a scientist, nor an engineer. Rather, he is a radio reporter for the bathetically conceived EBC, an independent commercial station

whose status as not-the-BBC has to be explained on every new encounter. He is an observer, not a participant or an agent, and any suggestion that his broadcasting might have the power to effect change is roundly rebutted by Wyndham's parodies of the popular press and passages that variously adopt the voices of capital, communism, the military and the man in the street. As previously discussed, Mike's eyewitness account of the destruction of Smithtown is rapidly lost in the cacophony of the anti-Bocker backlash, and by the final section of the book, the futility of both his and Phyllis's roles as 'reporters' has become abundantly, unbearably, clear (225–26). Mike makes no heroic voyages in bathyscapes, there is no 'enemy' to confront and while he saves Phyllis from a tentacle, it is she who ends up comforting him.[47] Work – the touchstone of postwar masculinity – sustains him, but it does not enable him or give him any form of agency beyond that of passive witness.

This is not, then, a conventional narrative of prosthetic agency and postwar man-making. Mike is a largely stable, well-adjusted figure, and while his nightmares suggest conventional frustrations at his inability to protect a woman in jeopardy, his quotidian conscious self is entirely comfortable with Phyllis's public professional agency. Phyllis, in turn, upends assumptions that a woman's primary role is to form a rehabilitative prosthesis for her husband. She is a successful independent screenwriter, and a creative collaborator whose ability to enhance Mike's work is readily acknowledged by him. The events of the book also prove her to be practical, far-sighted, intelligent and self-sufficient. She grasps the implications of the bathy threat long before those around her, and teaches herself bricklaying in order secretly to stash what she correctly anticipates will be vital food supplies. Phyllis and Mike thus represent an improbably feminist incarnation of domestic citizenship: they are equal partners in an ideal companionate marriage.[48] The narratives of prosthetic agency that concern this book offer an imaginary space of risk and reward, a psychic conditioning for the pressures – both mundane and extreme – of civilian life. They plot narratives of male achievement in situations largely devoid of women and offer happy

heteronormativity as their customary end point. In the popular cultural imaginary of the early 1950s, *The Kraken Wakes* is an aberration: Phyllis is Mike's equal in work, and is superior in the skills required for surviving apocalypse. And it is this, rather than the alien invasion, that most clearly distinguishes the novel as an exercise in future thinking.

Wyndham's satire exposes the limits of scientific agency but offers some hope of a companionate and sustaining domestic citizenship. Another satire, Ealing's 1951 comedy *The Man in the White Suit*, refuses such consolation – and, in the process, constructs one of the period's most categorical indictments of the scientist as a threat to society. At the beginning of the film, Sidney Stratton (Alec Guinness), the brilliant chemist who invents a fabric that repels dirt and never wears out, is admiringly described as a 'knight in shining armour' who has won the battle against 'shabbiness and dirt'.[49] But his innovative techno-modernity hides a disturbing reality. Indeed, Stratton is neither a conventional mad scientist nor a figure of fun. He is, rather, an irrepressible trickster figure, whose mild, self-effacing exterior hides a ruthless determination and an anarchic lack of social responsibility. The threat posed by Stratton is primarily figured through his impact on industrial relations – his innovations threaten both the profits of capital and the security of workers – but, as Tony Shaw observes, Stratton's 'total lack of consideration for the consequences of his actions' is equally a 'sideswipe at the reckless, disinterested nuclear scientist'.[50] It is no coincidence that one of the features of the remarkable white suit is that it glows in the dark, turning Stratton into one of a long line of radioactive science fiction monsters – and like all good mythological monsters, he is gifted with an endless capacity to return. Like a parodic superhero, or, more appropriately, supervillain, he lurks in the corridors, disguised as a janitor, surreptitiously and parasitically grafting his experiments onto the solid body of traditional manufacturing. Within the space of the film, he is defeated, but his last words, uttered as he walks unemployed from the factory staring at his notebook, are an ominous 'I see'.

With this, the soundtrack's gurgling 'Experiment' leitmotif starts up again, and it is evident that Sidney has suffered a set-back, not a defeat.[51] In terms of masculinity, Sidney Stratton is closer to Reynolds, the cyborg hero of MacLean's *The Last Frontier*, than he is to the eccentric boffin of wartime; but while Reynolds learns the lesson of social integration, Stratton ends the film as isolated – and dangerous – as he started.

The Man in the White Suit thus refuses conventional strategies of man-making. Technology does not enable Sidney, except insofar as his initial success gets him official access to a laboratory, which he then repeatedly blows up. Similarly, romance does not figure as a mode of empowerment or effective socialisation. Stratton catches the attention of Daphne (Joan Greenwood), daughter of the industrialist Birnley (Cecil Parker). When he tells her about polymerisation, it is hard not to see a parody of *Brief Encounter*, in which Alec's technical account of the diseases of the lung mesmerises Laura, and symbolises the unspeakability of their desire. The allusion, however, is a red herring. Daphne, described in the script as a 'person given to enthusiasms', becomes not the lover but the translator, explaining what the scientist has achieved to hidebound industrialists and facilitating Sidney's progress through the narrative. Arguably, what unites Daphne and Stratton is generational: they are youth and the future, radical elements threatening the stability of tradition. But there is no union of lovers to compensate for public failure, and in this, the film refuses the comforts of social integration comedy – in which inversions of social order and propriety are resolved through the containment of heteronormativity – in favour of something much more disturbing. 'Stratton's disrupting force has not in fact been neutralised,' argues Ian Green; more significantly, the scientist is, once again, figured as anti-social and not quite human.[52]

The rejection of Sidney Stratton, even if shadowed by the extremely likely prospect of his resurgence, is an assertion of mundane humanity against machine-engineered supremacy. The white suit repels dirt; the film reinstates it as a necessary component

of social cohesion and a marker of the limits of dissent. The comforts of a shabby familiarity speak to the distrust of modernity and implicit support of traditional hierarchies that Geraghty identifies as integral to 1950s comedy.[53] *The Man in the White Suit* suggests that while eccentricity is a cherished British characteristic, it exists in tension with conformity: citizens must be able to subordinate their desires to the needs of the group and the dictates of authority, to which the film shows a degree of deference, even while subjecting it to ridicule. At the film's end, the monstrous un-dead capitalist Sir John Kierlaw, and the hypocritical, mildly pompous narrator Birley, regain their authority and anxious command of the status quo. This has been the comedy of carnival and not a fundamental revolution in class politics or generational power. Yet, whatever his flaws, Sidney Stratton is possessed of scientific integrity. The one thing he cares about is the work, and it is this single-mindedness that makes him such a resilient figure (as was the case with Hammond Innes's protagonists and antiheroes). Stratton's absolute focus on work makes him oblivious to wider social obligations, a danger the film is at pains to delineate. Yet, this begs the question: is the scientist actually competent to engage with real-world problems? Nigel Balchin's *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), a novel replete with scientists and troubled masculinity, arguably offers the period's most sustained exploration of this dilemma. The first part of this study departed from the postwar reinvention of Sammy Rice, the self-loathing protagonist of *The Small Back Room*, and it ends with a return to Balchin, the poet of postwar technology and the scientific workplace.

Full Circle: Nigel Balchin and the Limits of Prosthetic Agency

> As the train started to move I looked out at Strang and waved my hand. He waved back, and then pulled himself up and

> saluted. I thought, 'If only I'd messed it up in a different way and killed myself, he could have done that and meant it.'[54]

While Powell and Pressburger's Sammy Rice was rehabilitated through the prosthetic power of technical competence, and rewarded with a uniform, Balchin's original proved unable to believe that work, knowledge, risk or bravery could ever compensate for a lack of bodily wholeness. Unable to believe in his own coherence, Sammy remains convinced to the end that others see him not as a man but as an assemblage of inadequacies. His only consolations are Susan – who he resents as much as he desires – and the comforts of cynicism. Six years after Sammy's failure to 'think of something concrete to do',[55] Balchin published *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), a study of a group of scientists trying to work out whether there is something concrete they can do. This ethical dilemma emerges from the Cold War rather than the Second World War and there are no bombs to defuse, but it nonetheless revisits crucial questions of authority, courage and the integrity of (the) work and, through them, suggests the limits of civilian masculine agency.

Beyond the personal desires and dilemmas of the individual men, *A Sort of Traitors* debates the place of science and scientist in the modern world. Its plot anticipates, in thriller form, the tortured manoeuvrings of C. P. Snow's 'New Men', but it approaches its subject matter with a comic touch entirely absent from the latter.[56] The book is set in the Haughton Laboratory, home to Professor Lucas Sewell and his research group, including the senior researcher Fred Sholes and two young scientists, Bob Marriott and Lucy Byrne. After some twenty-four years' research on 'bacterial infectivity and virulence', and years of hesitation concerning publication, Sewell and Sholes determine their work is ready – only for the government to veto publication.[57] Where the researchers see discoveries that could be used to prevent epidemics, those in authority see only the potential threat of biological warfare (59). Lines of conflict emerge that are both national and ethical. Who determines the use to which

research is put? Does the scientific community transcend national boundaries? Which lives matter? Does national interest supersede the good of humanity? Is the country, in 1949, still at war? The veto impacts the characters in different ways: Sewell's pride is severely dented and he experiences a crisis, as much of vanity as of ethics; Sholes is pragmatic; Marriott, fresh from a lecture on 'the Scientist's Place in the Modern World', is furious (34). That this anger finds an outlet in the possibility of treason – the dissemination of the now secret research by 'other means' – is down to the novel's other key character, Ivor Gates, a manipulative, disabled veteran. Gates, formerly engaged to Lucy, now lives with her in a sado-masochistic relationship in which she looks after his physical needs and provides an outlet for his frustrations.

Sewell, Marriott and Gates thus form a triumvirate through which the limits of prosthetic agency are enacted. Marriott and Sewell function as mirrors of each other, one struggling to make the transition from boy to man, the other fearing the onset of old age. Marriott, invoked at the beginning of this chapter as the epitome of scientific naïvety, is a young man desperately seeking agency, who thinks – albeit briefly – that knowledge might bring if not personal power then at least human good. He is described by Lucy in crushing terms: 'Man in the lab. Boy in the lab, really. Actual age twenty-four. Mental age about seventeen. But quite nice' (29). Sewell, meanwhile, sums him up with the observation 'he'll probably do an excellent job, as long as he doesn't burn the place down with the best intentions in the world' (43). Struggling to assert himself, Marriott retains a romantic conception of the scientist hero and fantasises about technology as a mode of man-making. Indeed, he experiences a confrontation with fear that Sammy Rice would have recognised, forcing himself to the point of physical sickness by volunteering to be bitten by infected flies.[58] Compared with the business of bomb disposal, this is tragedy repeated as farce, but the psychological echo of the earlier book is clear. Marriott is destined to be roundly disabused of his illusions, but it is a measure of his immaturity that even as he is rescued from the consequences of his

actions, he can feel only teenage resentment at having been humiliated and deprived of his grand gesture (239–40, 248, 250). Marriott's humiliation is intensified by the fact that he is 'saved' by the strategic and more politically astute actions of Lucy and Sewell. His freedom is dependent on an old man he had considered compromised and a woman he had repeatedly dismissed, even while desiring her. Marriott has all the faults of reckless and angry youth, but Balchin's novel is replete with ironies and delights in exposing all its characters' shortcomings. Shortly before the phone call from Lucy that prompts his intervention, Sewell himself has spent eight hours composing letters to government and the international scientific community in a desperate search for the right words through which to achieve his own grand gesture. The old man who still feels himself a young man is saved from his own mistakes by the clumsy and conspicuous floundering of youth. In a further compounding of the plot's ironies, the act of saving Marriott re-energises Sewell, leaving him, for the first time, unambiguously and 'immensely' happy (240). The agency of leadership revives Sewell; Marriott's best hope is the prosthetic agency of a supportive woman. He is last seen following Lucy in search of a taxi, the moral equivalent of Sammy's decision at the end of *The Small Back Room* to 'go home now and hand over to Susan'.[59]

Neither work nor science have been much use to Marriott as man-making activities. In this, he is an early representation of a new postwar generation. He is not a veteran, nor is he psychologically compromised by his non-combatant status in the manner of Sammy Rice. His problems are rather those of youth – he is an improbable manifestation of the rebel without a cause – and he is not treated sympathetically. *The Small Back Room*, like *Darkness Falls from the Air* (1942) and *Mine Own Executioner* (1945), uses the first person to give an intimate account of male crisis, self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy: insight into emotions that could not publicly be expressed. Although the third-person narration of *Traitors* makes ample use of free indirect discourse, adopting the voice and perspective of the characters, the reader is not offered the same

level of intimacy, nor encouraged to make a fixed identification. Similarly, little guidance is offered as to the rights and wrongs of the ethical debate at the heart of the book. Sammy Rice might be a self-pitying alcoholic, but the reader is encouraged to trust his judgement when it comes to scientific matters and their real-world applications.[60] The same cannot be said for *Traitors*, not least because the dilemma of action is shared by the immature Marriott and the ageing Sewell. Those characters who do not share their dilemma – Lucy, Sholes – do not articulate their reasons for compliance with the non-publication directive. Sholes does express ethical concerns when non-publication turns into developing 'supervirulents' for defensive (or indeed offensive) purposes; Lucy, as a woman and hence already unfairly suspected of traitorous intent, is not even invited to share in the agency of national defence. Much of the book, then, absorbs the point of view of the egotistical young and the egotistical old, and it is hard to escape the suspicion that private rather than public interest ultimately dominates their actions.

While the narrative also makes brief forays into the consciousness of bureaucrat Ralph Peach and Ivor Gates, the glimpses of Lucy are scant and mostly focused on her personal defences. Balchin prefers, with conscious irony, to let the men explain her behaviour, beliefs, feelings and actions on the basis of their deep-rooted understanding of female psychology (148). The text is thus replete with mansplaining, within which Lucy exists as a still centre. Yet, her actions speak louder than the male characters' words. She outwits the MI5 agent Mr Prince; she prompts Sewell to intervene; she defeats Ivor's scheme to discredit Marriott, even as she weeps over his corpse. In the midst of these actions, she does her job and is wholly untainted by the treacherous desire for political agency that consumes the men. This perhaps typically posits women as beyond the political: enigmatic, unreadable and absorbed in the private. She is certainly figured as maternal, needing to care first for Gates and then for Marriott. But her closest male analogue is Sholes, the one male figure without vanity and egotism, the man who is

driven by the work itself and not its public implications. Lucy and Sholes are the realists and the ideal embodiment of the form of postwar male agency applauded by writers such as Innes and Shute. Sewell and Marriott are the egotists; but in their vanity, they also convey purpose, a desire to effect change. They are more ambivalent figures closely related to a long tradition of scientific over-reachers and yet complexly imbricated in the specific historicity of the postwar.[61] The courage of their grand gestures is redundant – decadent even – and ironically more suited to wartime than to an aftermath shaped by the covert hostilities of the Cold War. Faced with a choice between compromised agency and impotence, they expose the limits of work as an end in itself, even as work is, in the end, their only consolation.

The ironies of Balchin's morality play are exacerbated by his trickster figure, Ivor Gates. Gates is a magnificent austerity Iago, a Machiavellian generator of intrigue and plot. Crucially, in the context of this book's wider preoccupations, he is also a figure who refuses rehabilitation. Ivor's resistance to the narrative of postwar reconstruction is evident at both literal and symbolic levels. Having lost both hands through friendly fire, he does not accept what has happened to him, nor work towards regaining independence and agency; rather, he rages against his fate and effectively weaponises his own passivity. When first introduced, Ivor is punishing Lucy for coming home late:

> As she combed back the rather long, black, smooth hair she glanced down at Trevelyan's *Social History* which lay open before him. 'How are you getting on with that?'
>
> Ivor said, 'These two pages are admirable. But it would be nice to go on to another soon. I've been reading these for about an hour now.'
>
> She saw it coming but there was nothing to be done about it. She said, 'But you can turn over, Ivor.'

> He smiled at her brightly and said, ‘No. I’m afraid I’ve lost both my arms. The left one is gone as you see, and if you look closely you will see that this one on the right is artificial.’
>
> ‘But you could turn over all right this morning, darling,’ said Lucy uselessly. ‘Have you lost the trick?’
>
> (28)

Ivor’s refusal of literal prosthetic agency is a means of acquiring psychological power. Through his deployment of helplessness, he torments Lucy, taking sadistic pleasure in manipulating her emotions. He equally enjoys a degree of voyeuristic pleasure watching the development of her embryonic romance with Marriott. Indeed, his interrogation of Marriott’s intentions gradually evolves into a sado-masochistic exercise in vicarious fucking that culminates in Ivor collapsing exhausted in a heap of snot and tears (110–11). That Lucy understands what is at play in this psycho-sexual landscape is made clear by her Pavlovian reaction to Ivor’s performance of sarcasm, faux-tenderness, resentment, bitterness, abuse and tears – ‘Her hands were shaking. This was always the worst bit, when one knew it was coming but it wouldn’t get started’ (29) – but also by her determined attempts to keep the naïve Marriott away from him. Marriott, meanwhile, feels himself magnificent for making friends with Gates, imagining, in the most patronising of fashions, that he understands him as no woman could (118, 156).

Gates’s troubling of concepts of agency is reinforced by his eventual suicide. He departs the book with a soliloquy, a resounding ‘fuck off’ to the world in lieu of the note he cannot compose, having refused to learn to write with his toes (202–3). In this final act, he speaks to the reader but refuses an intradiegetic explanation for his actions.[62] Rather, as he sets about the business of gassing himself, Gates asserts the point that nobody sees his real motives, desires or

actions because they only see his disability and make assumptions on that basis:

> 'I can't think what you [Lucy] were doing to put him in my mouth – unless you *wanted* him [Marriott] scuppered. If not, you're just mad. My only regret is that you couldn't have found somebody more worth while. I wish he'd been a tougher proposition. I'm good, and it was a waste to use it on him' … After a while he smiled slightly and said, 'Your bloody England with its bloody sanctimoniousness and all its people with arms and no heads. Don't you know an Irishman when you see one?'
>
> (216)

It's a splendid exit, but at the same time as Gates is a potent and anarchic Satanic tempter, he is also presented as a man utterly disgusted by his own lack of bodily wholeness (88, 110, 215). This disgust makes him as much a version of Sammy Rice as is Marriott or Sholes, but the nature and severity of his disability radically others him, divorcing him from concepts of male heroism that Sammy could at least approximate, and raising complex questions about postwar citizenship. British society's struggle to find a discourse that might register disability in non-disabling terms will be discussed in Part II, but Balchin's construction of Ivor's predicament is indicative of the impossible relationship between irreparable physical damage and masculinity. This is made evident in the characterisation of Gates, who cries repeatedly and is described as having a curious feminine smile (109, 156). Figured as a consummate performer, he is cunning, deceptive and – due to his lack of hands – exists in a feminised state of enforced passivity. The emasculating force of the absent hands is reinforced through the book's use of 'holding hands in the cinema' as a comic shorthand for Lucy and Marriott's sexual desire and, through a metonymic chain of signification, connecting hands with work, capital, agency and authority. If it is a marker of capitalist masculinity to acquire possessions, Gates is radically unmanned by his inability to hold on to anything:

> He wished dully that he had a drink, and there was some whisky somewhere. But for that matter there was golf and painting and duck shooting and women and steeplechasing and piano playing, if you could reach out your hand and take them. That had always been the most difficult part – to realise that though the things were there, they weren't yours any more.
>
> (215)

Playing with Marriott and tormenting Lucy cannot compensate for what he has lost, and the book is brutal in its repeated emphasis on the transcendent functionality of the scientists' hands. Sewell has 'very beautiful' hands that move 'with a sort of selfconscious grace', and even the otherwise inept Marriott is gifted with hands that transfigure his clumsy personality (14). Left to their own devices, doing work, his hands are automatic, competent and always mesmerisingly beautiful (93–94). With every mention, the agonising visibility of Ivor's lack comes into sharper focus: he becomes a lurid, unwelcome and embarrassing residue of war that the nation would rather disavow. Ivor's fate is inevitably to be feminised: it is perversely to Balchin's credit that, in his manipulation of Marriott, he at least achieves the agency of a femme fatale.[63]

A Sort of Traitors was filmed in 1960. Retitled *Suspect* and scripted by Balchin, it faithfully re-enacted the main aspects of the novel's plot and recycled the bulk of its dialogue.[64] The Second World War is updated to Korea, Gates is renamed Andrews and extra motivation is given for his bitterness by the revelation that he had been an aspiring concert pianist. To rub this point home, the film runs to a soundtrack of Chopin and Scriabin. The most significant distinction between book and film, though, is once again to be found in the ending, where Balchin reveals what he had learned from Powell and Pressburger's earlier adaptation of his work. Lucy's subversive agency evaporates: her phone call does not get through. Sewell alone intercepts Marriott, and Marriott in turn is offered a direct route to heroic agency. Dispatched to meet the dubious agent

Brown and his spies, he is redeemed through the traditional and unambiguous man-making activity of a fist fight.

Man-making through risk, or physical violence, was an option seldom available to the disabled veterans who wrote, and the wounded characters who appeared, in the aftermath of the war. Rather, given the insistent association of masculinity with corporeal integrity, cinema and fiction struggled to find narratives of agency that would compensate for lack and minimise the cultural disturbance represented by the damaged male body. Veterans turned to autobiography and memoir as a means of asserting both their agency and their ability to conform to masculine cultural norms; novelists sought to reassure their readers that wartime damage could be corrected or ameliorated; cinema triumphed over adversity. The second part of this book, then, considers the representation of disabled masculinities across a range of different genres, and explores the more or less successful incorporation of the non-normative male body into the plots of work, agency and domestic citizenship.

[1] Tim O'Sullivan, '*Suspect*: In Search of the "Superior Support"', in *Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture*, eds. Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells, Trowbridge: Flick Books, 2000, 206.

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[2] Agatha Christie, *Destination Unknown* (1954), London: Fontana, 1962, 111.

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[3] Accounts of the changing cinema representation of the scientist hero are provided by Robert A. Jones, 'The Boffin: A Stereotype of Scientists in Post-War British Films (1945–1970)', *Public Understanding of Science*, 6:1, 1997, 31–48, and Andrew Spicer, who suggests a trajectory in which wartime idealism turns to technocratic modernity before swiftly giving way to anxiety

(*Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 55–64).

[4] Nigel Balchin, *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), London: Collins, 1964, 34–37.

[5] Film examples of the sequestering of scientists and the struggle to possess them include *The Net* (1953) and *Little Red Monkey* (1955). See Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 47–50.

[6] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (1957), London: Mandarin, 1990, 71.

[7] My concern in this chapter is specifically with representations of scientists in popular genres such as the thriller and the male middlebrow novel. The actual genre of science fiction, its growth and development in this period, is beyond the scope of this study, although I have included discussion of John Wyndham, not only because of his mainstream appeal but also on account of his capacity to combine the science fiction novel of ideas with wry comedy, male melodrama and an acute attention to contemporary socio-political anxieties. See Andy Sawyer, '"A stiff upper lip and a trembling lower one": John Wyndham on screen', in *British Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. I. Q. Hunter, London: Routledge, 1999, 75–87.

[8] Ernest Barker (ed.), *The Character of England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947, v. While 'England' is often taken to represent the whole of the British Isles, in this case, the emphasis is firmly on the nation of England – a delimiting factor that leaves the 'Science' chapter struggling to find ways of appropriating key Scottish innovators such as James Clerk Maxwell and Lord Kelvin.

In both cases, a period of residence at Cambridge is seen as equivalent to naturalisation (266–67).

[9] Basil Wiley, ‘Thought’, in Barker, *The Character of England*, 338–39.

[10] James Sutherland, ‘Literature’, in Barker, *The Character of England*, 317, 310.

[11] Ibid., 320.

[12] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (1959), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 10.

[13] William Cecil Dampier, ‘Science’, in Barker, *The Character of England*, 260.

[14] Ibid., 252.

[15] Ibid., 279.

[16] Spicer, *Typical Men*, 47–51, 91. Richard Gordon’s books, on which the doctor films were loosely based, undoubtedly undermine the inflated status of the medical profession, but they also reveal a familiar distrust of intellectual ability and professionalism. In *Doctor in the House*, the narrator’s medical school interview focuses on his prowess at rugby, and the book concludes with a homily from the ‘Padre’, a bartender who has overseen the students’ crucial training in homosociality: ‘A lot of people can get an education, but not many of ‘em can collect as sound a bunch of

good friends as you young gentlemen do' (London: Michael Joseph, 1952, 189).

[17] Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'*, London: Routledge, 2000, 36.

[18] Ibid., 37.

[19] C. P. Snow, *The New Men* (1954), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, 100.

[20] Ibid., 177. See also 171, 196.

[21] Stephen Guy, discussing the ideological values of the Boultings' *Seven Days to Noon*, observes that the depiction of Professor Willingdon associates pacifist idealism and opposition to the bomb with almost criminal credulity, irrationality and 'alienation from normal society' ('"Someone Presses a Button and It's Goodbye Sally": *Seven Days to Noon* and the Threat of the Atomic Bomb', in *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture*, eds. Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells, Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000, 150). David Seed develops the implications of this abnormality by noting that not least of the threat posed by the professor comes from the fact that he has 'no political motivation or allegiance' and cannot therefore be categorised or contained ('*Seven Days to Noon*: Containing the Atomic Threat', *BJHS*, 45:4, 2012, 648). 'The film', he concludes, 'complicates the whole notion of an enemy' (652).

[22] Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*, 46

[23] Snow, *The New Men*, 137.

[24] Ibid., 140–41.

[25] Ibid., 109.

[26] Alastair MacLean, *The Last Frontier* (1959), London: HarperCollins, 2004, 93, 136.

[27] Ibid., 147.

[28] Ibid., 148.

[29] Ibid., 236. Jansci also lectures on the relationship between science and politics: 'Ask the rulers of the great nations who should be leading our sick world to a better to-morrow what their greatest need to-day is, and they will tell you scientists and still more scientists – those luckless, brilliant creatures who had long since traded in their birthright of independence, buried their consciences, and sold out to the governments of the world – so that they can strive harder and still harder until they have in their hands the ultimate weapon of destruction' (326). These configurations of the scientist also represent a perversion of 'work' as an ideal and a man-making methodology.

[30] John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954, 60.

[31] Ibid., 260.

[32] Ibid., 242–43, 257–58.

[33] Ibid., 258.

[34] John Wyndham (1953), *The Kraken Wakes*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, 132. Subsequent references given in the text.

[35] The travails of Dr Honey are discussed in Chapter 2. Before long, Mike observes, metal fatigue emerges as 'a useful cover for various misfortunes, and the terms china-fatigue and glass-fatigue were becoming current conveniences' (88–89).

[36] Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes*, 79–80. In a neat upending of the racial prejudices that contributed to the complacent reactions of the novel's first half, Bocker reports that it is Japanese scientists who have found a way to clear the ocean deeps of the pressure-resistant alien forces (239).

[37] The depiction of what might be seen as a climate emergency and the international complacency, argument and inaction that greets it makes for disturbing reading in the twenty-first century, not least because the bathies' final 'weapon' is a form of ecological vengeance: the warming of the sea.

[38] Aldiss, quoted in Alice Ferrebe, *Literature of the 1950s: Good, Brave Causes*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 215.

[39] The categorisation of Wyndham as middle class and cosy is also challenged by Jerry Määttä in 'The Politics of Post-Apocalypse: Ideologies on Trial in John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*', in *Science Fiction, Ethics and the Human Condition*, eds. Christian

Baron, Peter Nicolai Halvorsen and Christine Cornea, Cham, Switzerland, Springer International, 2017, 207–26.

[40] Ferrebe, *Literature of the 1950s*, 216–17. Ferrebe sympathises with Aldiss's accusation of cosiness, while nonetheless arguing convincingly for the triffids' political relevance and capacity to disturb (217).

[41] He also ironically depicts, in the emergent age of decolonisation, the failure of a nation of Empire builders adequately to respond to their own colonisation. Most often, this is configured through the 'mastery' of the seas, but its broader implications are made explicit by the ever-perceptive Bocker: 'They are, you see, in the position of – well, no, they are *actually* pioneers, colonists. Once they have safely arrived they set about improving and exploiting their new territory' (63).

[42] Robert MacFarlane, introducing the reprint, observes that Pirrie, the lieutenant, is John's 'tutor in pragmatic atrocity'. Even before these excesses, however, women have become victims and commodities within a new social economy. John's wife and daughter are captured and raped when they have scarcely left the suburbs. The book also shares the period's emphasis on work and autonomy as essential components of masculinity. Early in the story, before violent reality bites, Custance echoes the new-world fantasies of Wyndham's Bill Masen: 'Things will be hard, but it may not be a bad life. It will be up to us what we make of it. At least, we shall be our own masters' (John Christopher, *The Death of Grass* (1956), London: Penguin, 2009, x, 54).

[43] Adam Roberts, for example, observes that however hard narratives such as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* work to imagine a future, they equally preserve a vision of the past and its

preoccupations. The ‘chief mode of science fiction’, he concludes, ‘is not prophecy, but *nostalgia*’ (*Science Fiction*, London: Routledge, 2000, 33).

[44] John Wyndham, *The Seeds of Time* (1956), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, 123, 39.

[45] Ibid., 79

[46] The stories in *The Seeds of Time* were written at very different points in Wyndham’s career, and while not representing any radical feminist departures, they expose and examine stereotypes while meting out satisfying punishments to the misogynists of the future. In ‘Dumb Martian’, for example, a Martian woman, purchased by a brutal, racist space worker to act as his slave on an isolated asteroid, is taught to read by a visiting scientist. Rapidly revealing herself far brighter than her abusive husband, she learns all the necessary scientific skills to take a rewarding revenge. The collection also includes a body swap story, ‘Pillar to Post’, in which a disabled man, miraculously transplanted into a healthy future body, discovers that utopia is a different form of prison. A technologised future in which there is no need for work proves almost as disabling as the injuries that have left him confined to a wheelchair and in constant pain (166–67). Wyndham’s depiction of women is discussed by Amy Binns, who comments on both his ‘supremely resilient’ heroines and his belief that marriage and motherhood enslaved women (*Hidden Wyndham: Life, Love, Letters*, Grace Judson Press, 2019, 27, 240–54).

[47] Binns, *Hidden Wyndham*, 143. Later events further emphasise Phyllis’s resilience. Sometime after having been injured in the Caribbean bathy attack, she uncharacteristically collapses. It turns

out that she is exhausted from listening to Mike's traumatic nightmares and 'dissuading [him] from jumping out of the window to interfere' (166). Both depart for separate rest cures: when Mike returns, he finds Phyllis already back in action, laying 'bathy-traps' with Bocker in Spain (175).

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[48] Perhaps as a means of reassuring his readership that Phyllis actually *is* a woman, she gives birth to a son in the early stages of the book. He, and all the complications he would have represented, are swiftly removed by an early death. Notably, work is represented as healing for women as well as men (41).

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[49] The implications of something not wearing out are equally the subject of John Wyndham's satirical engagement with science, gender and society, *Trouble with Lichen* (1960). In Wyndham's novel, it is the human body that is given new longevity, through Antigerone, a substance simultaneously developed by a senior male scientist, who represses the knowledge, and a young female biochemist, who goes public, judging that only by living longer than a generation will the human race learn to fear the consequences of its actions (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, 87–89).

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[50] Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*, 156. A more explicit engagement with the 'moral issues' of nuclear weapons had been contemplated by director Alexander Mackendrick, but Shaw doubts that such a political topic could ever have made it past the censorship of producer Michael Balcon (243, fn. 66).

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[51] In the words of the script, 'with an assured and jaunty step, he walks on' – *The Man in the White Suit*, third shooting script (8 December 1950), BFI Collections, S170. The remorselessness of scientific enquiry is similarly stressed in the concluding scenes of

The Quatermass Xperiment (1955). After his first attempt at a manned space mission results in the death of two astronauts and the transformation of a third into a multi-tentacled human–cactus hybrid with the capacity to destroy London, it might be imagined that Professor Quatermass would pause for thought. Instead, he stomps away from the carnage announcing that he's going to 'start again', before the screen fades to a final shot of a new rocket launching.

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[52] Ian Green, 'Ealing in the Comedy Frame', in *British Cinema History*, eds. James Curran and Vincent Porter, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, 300. Green analyses the 'double function of the comic framework' in Ealing comedies, noting their capacity to overcome and reimpose censorship. Following Freud, he argues that the framework of comic fantasy enables criticism by lifting inhibitions: 'Take the frame away and you have the possibility … of direct criticism, unacceptable anarchy, rebellion, real conflict' (298).

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[53] Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 36, 56.

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[54] Nigel Balchin, *The Small Back Room* (1943), London: Cassell, 2000, 189.

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[55] Ibid., 192.

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[56] Balchin's novel had been reviewed by Snow in *The Sunday Times*, 19 June 1949 (Derek Collett, *His Own Executioner: A Life of Nigel Balchin*, Bristol: Silverwood Books, 2015, 215).

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[57] Nigel Balchin, *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), London: Collins, 1964, 15. Subsequent references given in the text. The news is conveyed

by Sir Guthrie Brewer, a physicist who resembles Virginia Woolf's Sir William Bradshaw: 'The air of well-dressed reason and good-tempered common sense that he carried with him and dumped on the desk under one's nose were almost as material a professional badge as a doctor's black bag' (178).

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[58] 'The sickness was getting worse but he knew he wouldn't really be sick because he never was. It was just the price you paid. He knew that he would pay it and a tremendous happiness came up through the waves of nausea. The young experimental biologist, covered in cold sweat, paying the price for those people in the street – for the others – the laymen' (53–54). The masochistic confrontation with fear is a feature of Balchin's narratives. Alongside Sammy's insistence on dealing with the bomb can be set Lawrence Spellman's negotiation of the foundry in *Sundry Creditors* (1953). Having escaped a burning tank in wartime, the molten metal generates a 'cold shaking fear' in him, but he nonetheless insists – as part of his 'private internal war' – on taking visitors to see the pouring (London: The Reprint Society, 1954, 11).

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[59] Balchin, *The Small Back Room*, 192.

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[60] The closest thing to Rice in this novel is the phlegmatic Dr Sholes – the man in the middle, a pragmatic figure who gets on with it and isn't given to grand gestures – but we never get to see his thoughts. Sholes, more than any of the other characters, fits the template of the 'man of competence' identified by Clive James as a recurring type in Balchin's fiction ('Prisoners of Clarity–1. Nigel Balchin', *The New Review*, 1:1, 1974, 66).

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[61] Spicer, *Typical Men*, 61–64.

[62] The recourse to dramatic conventions in Ivor's death is in keeping with the elements of muted tragedy that infuse the text. The title, *A Sort of Traitors*, is taken from *Richard II*; characters suffer agonies of indecision; power and jealously play their parts, as does comedy. Given the understanding of a British tradition of tragedy proposed by Sutherland in Barker's *The Character of England*, it is also worth noting Balchin's decision to leaven his melodrama, and his depiction of Ivor's rage, through comic scenes and moments of absurdity, particularly in the depiction of the MI5 agent Mr Prince and his pursuing hounds.

[63] Rosemarie Garland Thomson observes that 'disability and gender otherness' are fundamentally linked: 'the non-normate status accorded disability feminizes all disabled figures' (*Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 9).

[64] Interestingly, given the modes of man-making I've been discussing, a British Lion press release for the film gives the working title as *Risk*.

Part II

Disability

Chapter 4

Writing Rehabilitation

Prosthetic Autobiography and Self-(Re)invention

◈

Connecting blindness with insight, as so many writers have done, or connecting deafness with muteness, only reinforces a tendency in our culture to denigrate disability. By denigration, I include the process by which people with disabilities are portrayed as 'noble,' 'heroic,' and 'special.'[1]

It was perhaps necessary, for a country involved in a global war and one hugely dislocated by its effects, to view disabled men waging a war not merely against the Germans and their allies, but the adversary represented by their disability.[2]

'get killed properly and then you're a hero'[3]

Double amputee Ivor Gates's bitter insistence on corporeal absolutes and his virulent refusal of rehabilitation conjoin two contradictory but potent discourses of male damage in the aftermath of the Second World War. On the one hand, Ivor subscribes to the dominant myths of masculine agency: since masculinity is fundamentally about *doing*, a man cannot be a man without hands; equally, masculinity valorises conformity (masculinity is about fitting in), and the damaged, incomplete male body can never attain the social privilege of normative invisibility. The wounded hero would indeed be better off dead. On the other hand, Ivor's refusal of conventional rehabilitative measures designed to enable independence and comfort the non-disabled – his refusal to be managed and his weaponisation of his dependent state – makes him a radical assertion of otherness that insists on being seen and recognised *as* disabled. He is confrontational, active, ironically powerful. Through these contradictory states, Ivor exposes the tension between visibility and invisibility at the heart of normative masculinity and, in the process, draws attention to the paradoxes underpinning discourses of disability in the war and its immediate aftermath.

The contradictions embodied and articulated by Ivor Gates are integral to a larger context of ambivalence surrounding the wounded male body and its social standing in the twentieth century. The disabled veteran was a locus of both privilege and prejudice, and his presence, en masse, distorted long-entrenched discourses of disability that ran the gamut of stereotypes from the pitiable to the parasitic. Writing about the First World War, Joanna Bourke observes that the conflict 'created a new constituency of disabled people' and 'fundamentally altered the *whole* experience of disability'.[4] The needs of the veteran were prioritised, often at the expense of disabled civilians, including children and industrial workers. As limited resources were mustered to respond to the 'unprecedented' scale and severity of mutilation, a rhetoric emerged setting the 'unnaturally abnormal' against the 'naturally abnormal' and those perceived somehow to blame for their own impairment.[5] Yet, this valorisation of the wounded soldier did not last, and factors from

economic depression to the desire to forget the war contributed to a significant decline in servicemen's status.[6] Bourke's work ultimately suggests that the rhetoric and understanding of disability underwent little substantial change in the interwar period, but her findings nonetheless reveal that war has the potential, at least in the short term, to disrupt conventional discourses of normativity. Henri-Jacques Stiker expresses a similar ambivalence. The First World War represents a paradigm shift – the 'birth' of rehabilitation – and the emergence of 'a new way, both cultural and social, of addressing disability'.[7] Yet, the change is double-edged: while new terminology recognises damage, it accepts it only as a transitory phenomenon. 'The war has taken away, we must replace' or, ideally, we must efface.[8] The discourse of rehabilitation 'marks the appearance of a culture that attempts to complete the act of identification, of making identical', arguably the very normative invisibility against which Ivor Gates rebels.[9] That the war disrupted understandings of the body is, however, perhaps most evident from its impact on representations of masculinity. As Kate McLoughlin observes, it is 'a nigh-impossible task to enumerate the appearances of the First World War veteran in literature', and these veterans were, more often than not, damaged.[10] From D. H. Lawrence's paralysed Clifford Chatterley – simultaneously mechanised and infantilised, neither wholly human nor adequately male – to 'shellshock' victims as diverse as Virginia Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith and Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, the mental and physical wounds of war found diverse and widespread representation.

Bourke's meticulous history of the male body in Britain during and after the First World War provides a framework for approaching the Second World War.[11] Again, the disabled veteran holds certain cultural privileges: he benefits from his status as a formerly 'able-bodied' man, with all the dividends that brings (subject, of course, to such intersectional considerations as class and race); he is able to draw on the advantages of group identity (he is not alone – there are others like him and together they might form a more effective

lobby); and he benefits from the prosthesis of uniform. Even if no longer a combatant, he has a viable position, at least during the war years, within hegemonic constructions of masculinity: he is, as Julie Anderson suggests, still waging a war – albeit one against his own body.[12] Equally, memories of the First World War and a cadre of damaged men betrayed by postwar indifference remained fresh and generated a horror of repetition. An early memoir of wartime wounding, pseudonymously published by an 'RAF Casualty', makes this anxiety explicit, asking whether a new generation of the 'maimed and crippled' must, 'like many of their counterparts of a generation ago, know poverty and feel the soul-searing torment of grudging charity?'[13] Rhetorically and practically, then, the experience of the First World War did much to reconfigure approaches to disablement in the Second. It also provided painful lessons concerning the impact of mass mechanised warfare on the human body and mind; this experience contributed to a changing picture of wartime survival and rehabilitation, as did the considerable advances in medical technology across the interwar years. This transition is particularly evident in the treatment of burns, a mode of wounding that grew in scale and significance in parallel with the rise of the aeroplane as a weapon of war. Before 1939, notes Martin Francis, 'most victims of severe burns had died almost immediately', while Emily Mayhew observes that the 'reality for burn casualties in the interwar period was that seriously injured patients were given a little saline, a large dose of morphine and then taken home to die'.[14] The problem was a combination of shock and infection: advances in the treatment of both would have far-reaching consequences for severely wounded combatants. The interwar discovery of sulfonamide drugs offered new defences against bacterial infection, in particular streptococcus, and significantly improved outcomes not just for survival but for reconstructive surgeries. The eventual wartime arrival of penicillin – routinely used for wound treatment from 1943 onwards – was similarly transformative, improving outcomes from all types of surgery and radically changing the

prognosis for spinal injuries.[15] Less dramatically, but equally importantly, clinical understandings of shock in general, and the 'systemic catastrophe caused by a serious burn' in particular, led to the increasingly nuanced use of plasma transfusions, enabling patients to survive the initial impact of their injuries.[16]

These wide-ranging developments in medical technology ensured that, in Mayhew's trenchant phrase, suddenly, 'there were patients where before there had only been corpses', and an unprecedented number of men would survive traumatic wounding to face both the implications of disability and the broader cultural realignments of demobilisation.[17] In such a context, rehabilitation – as concept and discourse – would acquire new cultural and political significance. Indeed, argues Anderson, it became 'an all-encompassing technique and man management system that ensured that injured people were restored to the highest level of function possible after injury'.[18] These advances were accompanied by significant policy developments. The Tomlinson report of 1942 established the parameters of postwar government disability policy, taking responsibility for finding work out of the voluntary sector and into the purview of the state. Its central principle was 'that the only acceptable result of rehabilitation for a disabled person was "employment which he can take and keep on his own merits as a worker in normal competition with his fellows"'.[19]

The practical and cultural transitions that improved outcomes for war-damaged men were also, unexpectedly, supplemented by the exigencies of war itself, which generated a climate in which some newly disabled men were able to return to active service, not simply in support units but in combat roles. What it meant to be a functional male body was – for a brief period – radically rewritten. The key factors in this transformation were cost and the changing technologies of war. Training pilots was expensive and time-consuming; as the conflict drew on, the RAF became persuaded that damaged men could be rehabilitated for combat roles. As long as he was capable of getting himself into his aircraft, a fully trained pilot

was a ‘whole’ man, irrespective of the number of limbs he might possess. This prosthetic agency was not confined to the spectacular, well-known and atypical career of Douglas Bader: a significant principle was conceded in the return to active duty of another double-amputee pilot, Colin Hodgkinson, whose autobiography will be discussed in Chapter 6.[20] Disfigurement was equally irrelevant if adequate sight and hearing could be proved, while limited strength and flexibility in burn-damaged hands might also be overlooked in favour of experience, as was the case with Geoffrey Page, who returned to operational duties after some two years of reconstructive surgery, and ended the war a wing commander with the DSO, DFC and Bar.[21]

Wartime, then, forces cultures, however provisionally, to reconfigure conceptions of capacity.[22] Damaged and ‘abnormal’ male bodies are brought within the sphere of the normative, rendered acceptable by wartime work that awards them the badge of uniform. Visible disability even becomes a symbol of heroism: as former RAF officer William Simpson ironically observes, ‘you only had to be wounded and in uniform to be credited with phenomenal courage’.[23] For Simpson, engaging in the conventional discursive modesty of British masculinity, this equation left him feeling fraudulently ‘clothed in an aura of false heroics’,[24] but his point is nonetheless well made, and raises the question of what will happen to the disabled male body when the prosthesis of uniform is removed? According to David Serlin’s analysis of the American experience, the military industrial demands of the rapidly emerging Cold War generated ‘a hyperpatriotic culture’ that linked ‘public exhibitions of disability, heterosexual masculinity, and patriotic commitment’. While veterans themselves were largely silenced in the service of symbolising sacrifice, loyalty and duty, their bodies were expected to speak volumes: their disabilities became a ‘permanent uniform’ that offered status within a hierarchy of disability, and, to a certain extent, reinstated heteronormative agency.[25] With their non-conforming bodies reconfigured as

corporeal manifestations of the nation's resilience, the disabled American veteran became what Michael Billig terms a 'flag' of national identity. The veteran body, like 'the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building', becomes one of the quotidian reminders that constitute the 'endemic condition' of 'banal nationalism'.[26] It was, however, a different story in postwar Britain. In a bankrupt, war-weary nation, where the civilian population had suffered – and were still suffering – considerable hardship, a counter discourse emerged. Demobilisation and the rhetoric of domestic citizenship rendered military masculinities redundant, depriving most wounded servicemen of the protective prosthesis of uniform, and ensuring that the value of a uniformed past rapidly depreciated. Indeed, veterans returning to a bombed, rationed and weary home front were as likely to be seen as having escaped the worst of the war as understood to have sacrificed themselves for it.[27] The disabled veteran's symbolic value was residual: his new challenge was to be *useful*. He had to become a functioning cog within the emergent culture of wage-earning heteronormativity.[28]

And how was this to be achieved? The answer both replicates and rewrites Bourke's findings. Again, there was a window during which wounded masculinity achieved new prominence within discourses of social policy and medical rehabilitation; this time, however, it was accompanied by a far greater representational challenge to the rhetoric of passivity and dependency. A significant number of veterans wrote memoirs of their war service, narrating the experience of wounding and full or partial recovery. As the war itself gradually receded, these memoirs, and war memoirs in general, became an increasingly popular part of the reading landscape. Indeed, as discussed in the Introduction, accounts of combat were among the 'most widely read books in Britain in the 1950s'.[29] The wounded hero also returned to fiction, as both fantasy of agency and symbol of individual and social recuperation – a manifestation of what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have termed 'narrative prosthesis'. In Mitchell and Snyder's formulation,

'disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device'. Disability, they argue, 'serves as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse'.[30] The postwar proliferation of disabled protagonists supports and complicates this argument, with the veteran hero acting both as a symbolic manifestation of cultural malaise and as a mimetic representation of the contemporary male body. Significantly, the comparative liberation found in fictional representations of disabled veterans – their agency within some forms of crime and thriller narrative – was not matched on screen. Although the wounds of war were repeatedly symbolised through trauma (*The October Man*, 1947), amnesia (*Caravan*, 1946) and alcoholism (*They Made Me a Fugitive*, 1947), with a few notable exceptions, the visual representation of damaged bodies was avoided, ameliorated or pathologised in British postwar cinema.[31]

The second part of this book, then, is again concerned with the reconstruction of masculine agency through purposeful employment and domestic citizenship across a range of postwar texts. It begins by exploring writing itself as a mode of prosthetic agency, in the form of war memoirs that enact the reconstitution of the self through autobiography. In both fiction and life-writing, visibly damaged men achieve normality and the cultural privilege of relative invisibility through work and wedding, endorsing Robert McRuer's hypothesis that '[c]ompulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness; both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality'.[32] McRuer's influential argument invokes the work of both Adrienne Rich and Judith Butler to consider what he terms 'ability trouble', and to examine the compulsions of able-bodiedness, its rhetoric of tolerance and its intersectional implication in discourses of heteronormativity.[33] The mutual imbrication of discourses of gender and ability is made abundantly clear in publications such as Sir Ian Fraser's *The Conquest of Disability* (1956). The front matter for this edited volume of mini-'overcoming' narratives not only lists chapter titles and author

names, it also cites the occupations of contributors, while the chapters themselves do not just tell a story of recovery and the achievement of agency against the odds, they also pay tribute – in the majority of cases – to the unfailing support of a loyal wife or new partner.[34] The psychic and social value of heterosexual conformity cannot be underestimated in postwar disability discourse, and most veteran autobiographers acknowledge it through sincere tribute or the deflections of humour. *Victory in My Hands*, the autobiography of the American bilateral hand amputee Harold Russell, provides a succinct example:

> For a long time I had been bothered by the fact that I couldn't tie my tie … Just before he left I asked Charley how he managed his.
>
> He wanted to know if I had a girl. I said yes, but what did that have to do with it?
>
> 'Marry her,' he said, 'and she'll fix your tie for you.'[35]

Victory in My Hands is, as the title suggests, a narrative of triumph over adversity that seeks to reassure an able-bodied readership that disabled veterans can safely be reintegrated into postwar society. Russell, who went on to star in William Wyler's Oscar-winning homecoming drama *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1947), emerges as a robust and focused character, but also a man acutely aware that the work of reintegration falls squarely on the shoulders of the disabled themselves. Recounting the challenge of being visibly different, he recalls: 'In order to set strangers at their ease I dreamed up a bagful of coldblooded but effective tricks designed to break the ice, get a laugh or chuckle and cause everybody to relax.'[36] Superficially, Russell presents himself as the tough, good-humoured, non-threatening disabled person, happy to accept the fact of his otherness and only too willing to go the extra mile to make himself acceptable. He performs to be accepted.[37] But the

language he chooses resists compliance: he figures himself as a 'coldblooded' conman, tricking the gullible able-bodied. It is a micro-assertion that speaks to the pressure on disabled veterans not only to be 'cheerful' and 'inspirational' but also 'to find individual solutions within a constricted range of emotions, to the problem of bearing a visible disability in a world of able-bodied people'.[38]

The visibly disabled veteran is caught between scripted speech and silent symbolism, a dilemma that does much to explain the desire for normative invisibility at play in postwar memoirs. But not all veterans followed the script, and this chapter now turns to the memoirs of William Simpson, an RAF pilot who would not stay silent on the subject of his wounding. Simpson was the most prolific, arguably prolix, commentator on the experience of 'airman's burn': severe damage to the face and hands caused by exploding fuel tanks, cockpit fires and crashes. It was a pattern of injury new to the particular conditions of the Second World War, and much has been written about those who survived and those who treated them.[39] That this condition should have generated a literature of its own has much to do with an exceptional context of rehabilitation that was acutely aware not just of the physical but the social and psychic complexity of postwar man-making.

Saving Face: William Simpson's Textual Reconstruction

> [T]he biggest single achievement of the Guinea Pig Club is to have helped every member to save his face. His 'other' face, that is, in a psychological sense, so that he could securely take his place once more in society.[40]

> At its best, life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it. This inverts the intuitive idea

> that one lives one's life, then simply writes it down. Instead, in writing one's life one may bring a new self into being. If this is true, then in reading life narrative, we witness self-invention.[41]

The Guinea Pig Club was founded on 19 July 1941 by the occupants of Ward 3, a small wooden army hut in the grounds of the Queen Victoria Cottage Hospital, East Grinstead. Its stated aim was to 'promote good fellowship among, and to maintain contact with, approved frequenters' of the hospital, and it established three categories of membership: Guinea Pigs, Scientists and friends comprising the 'Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Guinea Pigs'.[42] Although originally envisaged as a drinking society, the Club's flippant constitution disguised a serious purpose, as the epigraph from Tom Gleave, the 'Chief Guinea Pig', attests. The Club was a self-run society for the 'protection', rehabilitation and care of RAF pilots and crew who had suffered traumatic burn injuries.[43] These wounds ensured that the inhabitants of Ward 3 not only faced multiple surgeries and years of hospital treatment, they also faced the prospect of carrying long-term, acutely visible disabilities into the postwar world. The story of the Guinea Pig Club has been told many times, as has that of the pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe, whose innovations as a reconstructive surgeon were matched by his attention to the psychic and social restoration of his patients. What was achieved at East Grinstead is recorded in histories, biographies and medical journals. It is of significance here because it gave rise to a remarkable instance of what might be termed 'prosthetic autobiography': the writing of memoir as a means of constructing a viable postwar masculinity. In this study's concern with the plots that remade postwar men, there is perhaps no more substantial example of self-invention and man-making through writing than the autobiographical project of William Simpson, a bomber pilot who wrote and rewrote his wartime experience across a fifteen-year period. Yet, Simpson was not the most famous, nor even the first, writer to emerge from the Queen Victoria Hospital. The first was Tom Gleave, whose *I Had a Row with*

a German appeared under the pseudonym 'RAF Casualty' in 1941. The most famous, undoubtedly, was Richard Hillary, whose bestselling semi-fictionalised memoir, *The Last Enemy*, was published in 1942 to considerable critical acclaim. Hillary's book would also prove a lasting influence on later memoirists, and it is worth recapitulating the narratives of heroism, homosociality and masculine self-development it inscribes and endorses.

The Last Enemy is an exemplary text of 'temperate' masculinity, combining the 'anti-heroic mood' of the interwar years with a fundamental reliance on the prosthesis of uniform.[44] Although beautifully composed to give narrative coherence to inchoate impressions and radically accelerated life experience, it can only manage this material through the assertion and valorisation of what might be termed 'unspeakable heroism', a mode of masculinity configured through modesty and restraint, and permeated by a deep discomfort around emotional display. Hillary's story demonstrates the cataclysmic transition that wounding initiates in male subjectivity, even as it refuses absolutely to discuss it, and it establishes a benchmark that later writers of wartime injury and survival must negotiate.[45]

The memoir opens vividly with an account of combat. The severely wounded Hillary falls from his burning Spitfire, descends by parachute into the North Sea, floats semi-conscious in anticipation of death but is rescued from the water. The narrative pauses at the 'infinite relief' of a hypodermic syringe, before commencing a flashback to Oxford at the time of the Munich crisis.[46] In the two parts that follow, the first is concerned with Hillary's university career and active RAF service, the second with the reconstruction of his face and hands in McIndoe's East Grinstead 'beauty shop'. Yet, as Mark Rawlinson has observed, the book's engagement with his physical injuries is ambivalent: the narrative, he argues, 'makes the wound highly visible, but ultimately turns it into a trope for an abstraction'.[47] His 'recovery' is thus only tangentially the subject of the book, which attempts to resist the 'comic masterplot' and

'triumphal' plotting that G. Thomas Couser identifies as a dominant expectation placed upon memoirs of illness and disability.[48] Indeed, rather than tracing the overcoming of adversity, Hillary turns his war memoir into a combination of *Bildungsroman* and tribute to the fallen. He is characterised as a selfish, arrogant, complacent individualist, out to enjoy the 'experience' of war, while heroism, courage and various forms of 'ideal' masculinity are displaced onto the men around him.[49]

Hillary's physical wounding thus becomes a prism through which to effect a psychic realignment of his political priorities. It represents a 'problem' to be negotiated not because of the damage or the pain it has caused him but because it has removed him from combat. In this sense, the entirety of *The Last Enemy* might be encapsulated in Ivor Gates's bitter assertion 'get killed properly and then you're a hero', and Hillary is painfully aware of this, rejecting the possibility of being 'maimed' with proleptic irony: 'In a fighter plane, I believe, we have found a way to return to war as it ought to be, war which is individual combat between two people in which one either kills or is killed.'[50] Hillary either cannot or will not engage with his disfigurement because he is caught up in the greater priority of negotiating the guilt of the survivor. His injuries seemingly exclude him from fighting, forcing him prematurely into a state of 'postwar' redundancy that manifests as a form of imposter syndrome. Meeting again a pacifist friend who has been traumatised by the war's exposure of his long-cherished ideals, Hillary claims that his profoundly disabling burn injuries are as nothing to the psychological wounds that his friend has suffered. Hillary disavows his experiences and the consequences of those experiences: 'I could not explain that what I had suffered I in no way regretted; that I had welcomed it; and that now that it was over I was in a sense grateful for it and certain that in time it would help me along the road of my own private development.'[51]

The book ends with an epiphany: in the chaos of the Blitz, the words of a dying woman pull Hillary into the common mass of

suffering humanity: 'I see they got you too.'[52] Her words at last prompt visceral emotion – self-loathing – enabling the 'plot' of *The Last Enemy* to reach its conclusion and, as Rawlinson observes, its beginning.[53] In coming full circle, the portraits of Hillary's friends and fellow pilots that have taken up so much of the narrative – in particular, the extensive eulogising of Peter Pease – emerge as epitaphs, as both an assertion of agency and a denial of disability. He will write the unspeakable 'for these men'.[54] He will do it because they cannot, not simply because they are dead but because they are exemplary Englishmen rendered inarticulate by the very virtues he attributes to them: Peter Pease, Hillary tells us, had 'an innate habit of understatement' and 'he never spoke of himself'.[55] The structure of *Bildung* was a smokescreen and the narrative resolves into an act of reinstatement, reiteration and displacement: Hillary refuses the protagonist's role and reconfigures himself as a frame narrator, reconstructing not himself but the others who have been lost. This displacement has a twofold purpose. Disabled frame narrators would become a curious feature of postwar fiction, and they represent a simultaneous denial and acknowledgement of wartime damage. Frame narrators acquire agency through controlling the narrative of others, and in so doing ensure that they do not become a spectacle for the reader's pity or revulsion. 'Framing' the narrative of the 'long-haired boys', and that of the beauty shop, Hillary asserts control over his own radical unmanning, and through a process of accounting – the naming of the dead – he claims to find an accommodation with the unbearable pressure of having survived. That this strategy was unsuccessful is evident from his eventual insistence on returning to active service when he was hardly fit to fly. He was killed in January 1943.[56]

Hillary did not ultimately have to consider the business of rehabilitation and reintegration – the management of his disability, and public responses to his disability – in a changing postwar world. He did not encounter the point at which wearing a uniform would no longer be possible and some form of viable peacetime masculinity

would need to be constructed, although his yearning for community and desperation to return to operational flying suggests that he, like many pilots who joined up straight from school or university, would have been ill-prepared for the transition to peace.[57] William Simpson, by contrast, did have to face the long-term consequences of life-changing disability, the psychic impact of demobilisation and the challenge of achieving domestic citizenship. In the process, he developed into a compulsive autobiographer and wrote not one but three accounts of his experience of becoming disabled. His first book, *One of Our Pilots Is Safe*, published in 1942, tells the story of his original wounding; the second, *The Way of Recovery* (1944), gives an account of his medical rehabilitation back in England. Ten years later, he told both stories again in *I Burned My Fingers* (1955), the title of which aptly encapsulates the cultural imperative to minimise and normalise the experience of significant disability.[58] A version of Simpson's life story also appears in Sir Ian Fraser's *The Conquest of Disability* (1956), and in 1961, it was finally told for him on the popular television programme *This Is Your Life*. Each of Simpson's books is inflected by the complex contexts of wartime and postwar composition, and each can be seen to represent a different phase – or genre – of autobiographical self-construction.

Simpson's story is extraordinary. He was shot down in France on 10 May 1940. Trapped in the cockpit of his burning Battle bomber, he suffered horrific burn injuries to his face, hands and legs. Rescued by his crew, he was shunted, in a state of immobility, from hospital to hospital, ahead of the advancing German army. By the time he reached Roanne, on 17 June 1940, the combination of haphazard out-of-date medical treatment and 'nightmare' journeys in ambulances and trains had conspired to damage most of his fingers beyond repair.[59] The hospital at Roanne provided a period of respite and he lay for ten months on his back – his wounds suppurating, his body covered in flies – 'never more than half alive'.[60] Remarkably, he survived the winter and by spring 1941 was able to walk. Hoping to be repatriated, he travelled to Marseilles but

on arrival was imprisoned in a military hospital, where he languished for two months before being sent to Lyon, where he was granted parole by a more benevolent regime. He used his relative freedom to wander the city, observing France under occupation, before eventually being repatriated via Spain and Portugal in October 1941. On his return to Britain, having lost all the fingers on his left hand and all but two short stumps on his right hand, and sustained significant facial injuries including the loss of his eyelids and part of his nose, he was sent, like Hillary, to East Grinstead for an extensive period of reconstructive surgery under Archibald McIndoe. While receiving eyelid grafts and a new nose, and undergoing multiple operations to render his right hand more robust and functional (the two remaining finger stumps were joined by a vestigial thumb), he enjoyed a period of work with the Special Operations Executive and negotiated the breakdown of his pre-war marriage. He then made a second marriage to a Ward 3 nurse, Monica, and they went on to have two children. Released from medical care, he was offered a choice between a ground job or being invalided out of the RAF; he opted for the latter, recognising that he would be disadvantaged if obliged to compete in the seemingly imminent demobilisation rush for civilian jobs.[61] In 1944, he took a job as a journalist on the *Sunday Express*, reporting on aviation matters, and in 1948, he joined British European Airways as a public relations officer.

Simpson did not share Hillary's narrative gifts. The first two books are disjointed, episodic, repetitive, uneven in tone and often marked by gender and racial stereotypes. Some of these structural flaws can be attributed to the process of composition. *One of Our Pilots* was composed on a Dictaphone, the cylinders for which Simpson could not change without assistance. The technologies that enabled this first narration were thus simultaneously those that disrupted it; it was, he writes, 'the most arduous of any work I have ever undertaken'.[62] *The Way of Recovery* was written longhand, holding a pen between the stumps of his two still painfully sensitive fingers: equally a compositional method that might not have encouraged extensive revision.[63] But technology cannot be held

accountable for the conventional framework of Simpson's descriptive palate, or for the sentimental quality of his portraiture. His heartfelt desire to pay tribute to those who enabled his recovery generates mawkish praise, such as this endorsement of conventional gender roles directed at a favourite Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse: 'She was a very sweet person and this was reflected in a certain softness in her eyes. When she laughed, it was quietly. What a wonderful thing it is to meet a woman who is content to serve humbly … instead of aspiring to a far easier form of war service.'[64] Ironically, Simpson would, in his later work, provide admiring portraits of women whose war service was far from conventional and who certainly did not laugh quietly; it is perhaps the case that at this stage of his writing career, stereotypes were the simplest method of conveying the virtues of the nursing staff he encountered. As his fellow burned pilot and memoirist Tom Gleave observes, the wounded man restored to health has an impossible debt to repay, a debt so great it defies articulation.[65]

Simpson's later writing, however, is more polished, and while *I Burned My Fingers* recycles much of the content of his previous memoirs, it does so with vigour.[66] He is liberated by the passage of time and is able to tell stories previously subject to censorship for public or private reasons. His adventures in France, for example, turn out to have included significant contact with resistance movements – material that obviously could not have appeared in 1942 or 1944 – and with a friendly brothel owner, Yvonne, who 'gave me a sense of manhood again'.[67] The book also has a conscious didactic purpose. This is, in part, what McLoughlin terms the veteran 'as pedagogue': Simpson has experience, he has reflected upon that experience and he wants to communicate what he has learned for the benefit of the wider community.[68] *I Burned My Fingers* makes this purpose explicit from the outset:

> My story is probably much the same as those of many men who finished World War II disfigured and maimed, but have since

> arisen from the flames like a phoenix to start a new and successful life. But most of those others stay silent, while I prefer to speak. And if my story helps you – the reader – to understand something of the special problems and thoughts of the disabled, then I shall be quite satisfied. For although the scarred and disabled do not want sentimental pity, they do need your understanding. They also need encouragement if they are to carry on as the normal people they are behind the mask of disfigurement or in spite of crippling aliments.[69]

On the surface, this might seem a conventional statement of 'triumph over adversity', an inspirational narrative that seeks to overcome the gulf separating the disabled other from the non-disabled norm. But the book – and Simpson's larger autobiographical project – is more complex than this would suggest, not least because of his own resistance to the very narrative he purports to tell. The opening of *I Burned My Fingers* is not his first statement of polemical intent. Consider this version from *The Way of Recovery*:

> The struggle for the recovery of complete independence was advancing well, but there was one other personal struggle which concerned me, and which must have concerned all others who have known infirmity and disfigurement. It was the struggle to force my way back into human society, to regain for myself acceptance by all persons in every walk of life and to impose on them recognition of the fact that I was a human being who was not subnormal. This struggle, parallel with that for independence, still goes on. … it is my aim to be restricted by nothing, and to be accepted everywhere. By forcing myself upon society in my present unfinished state of repair, I believe that I can help not only myself, but all with whom I come in contact, to get away from the idea that disfigurement and infirmity should be concealed.[70]

Here, the tensions in his purpose are more evident. While still didactic, the language is not that of compliance, conformity and mutually beneficial education. Rather, it is confrontational. Simpson is 'forcing himself upon society'; he intends to 'impose' upon the able-bodied 'recognition of the fact that I was a human being'. This is a very modern assertion of rights based on conspicuous visibility, embedded within an autobiographical project simultaneously driven by the struggle to achieve a masculine normativity founded upon the effacement of difference: independence, economic viability and the invisibility of domestic citizenship.[71] Both statements are also notably at odds with Hillary's displacement of the body and his assertion that the (British) airman belongs to a race of men who 'act and don't talk, or if they do, talk only shop',[72] although Simpson's deployment of the metaphor 'unfinished state of repair' acts as a reminder of the extent to which male subjectivity in both wartime and aftermath is managed through technological discourses. Simpson is not a wounded man: he is a work in progress.[73]

These textual tensions beg questions: why did Simpson feel the need to write his story multiple times? What did he hope to achieve? Does his relationship to his story, and the selfhood it encodes, change over the course of its reiterations? What stories do these books actually tell and what remains beyond articulation? Among the many characterisations of the veteran considered in Kate McLoughlin's comprehensive typology is the prolix survivor 'who will not stop talking about the war(s) they have been in'.[74] Such figures, suggests McLoughlin, are '*inhospitable*': 'breaching the boundaries of polite discourse, a discourse associated since the seventeenth century with reason and empiricism'.[75] By extension, these figures equally express anxiety about the capacity of such discourse to articulate the meaning of mass warfare. The prolix veteran says too much and says it too many times: he disturbs by providing too much information, and sows doubt through his repeated iterations, each new version rendering his narrative less, rather than more, convincing. At points, Simpson's artless narrative undoubtedly

unsettles. Although his first attempt at self-sustaining narrative, in *One of Our Pilots*, works hard to focus on matters of external interest, the abject body persists in breaking through. Simpson's wounds are 'crawling with maggots' and the 'stench' of his burns is judged 'unpleasant for everyone'.[76] The burned body is disturbingly mutable; its boundaries are unclear – it swells, suppurates, bleeds and eventually scars, forming new contours that at best uncannily replicate, or at worst efface, its previous delineation. How can the subject incarcerated in such a changed body negotiate the process of becoming and achievement of agency essential to configurations of masculinity?

Some answers can be found in the work of G. Thomas Couser, who has written extensively on disability and life-writing in a contemporary American context. He posits three 'common rhetorical patterns' that emerge in disability memoirs: the 'rhetoric of triumph', fundamentally linked to 'narratives of overcoming'; gothic plotting, focusing on the fear of bodily change, that might or might not be linked to a 'narrative of restitution' in which an external agent – such as a doctor – liberates the subject from traumatic bodily incarceration, and the 'coming out' or quest narrative, in which the writer goes through a process of 'owning and affirming [their] identity as a disabled person'.[77] All these strategies are pertinent to Simpson's autobiographies, and his various adoption and rejection of such narrative elements expose the pressures of gender conformity, the challenge of introspection and the limits of masculine self-fashioning in the emergent postwar period.[78]

Clearly, Simpson is uncomfortable with, and struggles critically to evaluate, the 'triumph over adversity' narrative. While he has self-evidently overcome adversity, he has done so, at least in part, through group membership. The achievement is not his alone.[79] He is also keen to control the reception of this 'triumph'. It is to be seen and yet not to be spectacular; it is to be a triumph into invisibility. His memoirs also negotiate the gothic formulation of otherness. His bodily state, in the first phase of his injury (France), is

catastrophically other – at least as far as conventional understandings of masculinity are concerned. His immobility leaves him in a feminised state of radical passivity. His decomposing body hovers abjectly between life and death. Yet, in *One of Our Pilots*, there is no external agent to save him; instead, he must save himself from the gothic plot in which he is trapped. He achieves this feat by deflection and surveillance, turning his inert body into a panopticon, mobilising a strategic gaze that reactivates his earlier military masculine self to survey and record France under occupation. Having survived, he ends the book by configuring a quest: the attainment of the best plastic surgery that Britain can offer.[80] This will be the subject of *The Way of Recovery*, which enacts an alternative version of the gothic plot, the narrative of restitution. In this account, a hero emerges in the form of Archibald McIndoe, whose surgical interventions restore independence and agency to the protagonist; however, given the nature of Simpson's wounds, full restitution is not possible, in either psychic or somatic terms. As a result, the memoir is less about restoration than rebirth: it brings a new self-consciousness – a new subjectivity – in which Simpson becomes properly aware of what it means to be conspicuous, and to be a 'disabled' man. Curiously, this becoming is configured in national terms. Vichy France was 'a topsy turvy world' capable of acting as an uncritical comforting mother to the wounded man; Britain is a hostile normative mirror of inappropriate or averted gazes.[81] Confronting British social embarrassment (a culture disturbed by the gothic otherness of the disfigured veteran), Simpson tells a story similar to that of Harold Russell's 'conman' anecdote, engaging in staring competitions that were all too easy for him to win and which left him 'feeling ashamed, for I was sure that sometimes I inflicted a permanent hurt'.[82] Again, this minor rebellion against the Oedipal father of social regulation and external judgement reveals the disabled man's acute awareness of the mutually implicated constitution of disabled and non-disabled subjectivities. We might also read this as another of Couser's

rhetorical patterns: the ‘coming out’ narrative. Accept me as I am, Simpson insists. These multifaceted negotiations of selfhood shape the first two books and much of the third before, in the closing pages of what might loosely be called a trilogy, Simpson unexpectedly exposes an earlier wound and source of self-loathing: his father’s deafness.

This revelation has a profound effect on the narrative arc. Simpson is more of a memoirist than an autobiographer: characters and events only appear when they are strategically necessary to his account of the ‘now’. He does not bother the reader with a backstory of his life before injury. This narrative does not concern what he has lost but rather what he has gained and endured. In the first two volumes, there is nothing about school, university, how he came to be a career RAF officer. We find out he is Scottish quite incidentally, and his wife, similarly, is not introduced. Indeed, he only narrates the story of his pre-war first marriage, and its wartime breakdown, in the third volume, largely as a necessary prelude to explaining the complications of his second. The sudden introduction of his father is thus unexpected and revealing. On the one hand, it is an acknowledgement of an earlier wound – the humiliation of having an ‘embarrassing’ father in the excruciating context of middle-class, adolescent, public-school self-consciousness – but he also seems to be invoking a curious fatalism: he has, in his conspicuous disfigurement, become the very thing he feared. Ultimately, however, even the deaf father is deployed in the service of masculine self-assertion, invoked to explain Simpson’s desire for physically undamaged children: ‘I felt that my recovery would not be complete until we had launched healthy children of our own upon the world with the properly earned means to give them a sound education and the best of everything that really matters.’[83] The successful foundation of the nuclear family – the achievement of patriarchal legitimacy and domestic citizenship – is the happy ending that concludes the ‘comic’ plot of Simpson’s autobiographical journey.

The need for narrative order manifest by both Simpson and Hillary acts as a reminder of the extent to which autobiography

functions as a mode of self-constitution. Couser's assertion that 'life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it' speaks to Simpson's understanding of narrative as progression.[84] He is writing himself out of passivity and into a reconfigured, but nonetheless active, male subjectivity. Equally, though, his work reveals the instability of this process and the fundamental role of reiteration in the formation and consolidation of subjectivity. In an 'able-bodied' world, Simpson's masculinity cannot but be precarious: he must constantly assert his functionality and cultural value. As a result, each narrative return to the wound works to restore agency as much through metaphoricity as through the actual reporting of recovery. And perhaps the most striking example of this is provided by Simpson's figuration of France.

In *One of Our Pilots*, in the midst of his account of his body's decay in the hospital at Roanne, Simpson writes 'I had already suffered for the French people, and now I was suffering with them.'[85] The isolated incarcerated survivor generates a community for himself and imagines a purpose within that community, suggesting that it is his 'duty' to 'try and understand' the French.[86] Drawing the book to a close, he reiterates this duty and authenticates his arguments through the assertion of his status as participant, witness and advocate:

> I sincerely hope that this book, with its exposure of some of the conditions I myself saw and experienced in France, may help to impress the value of freedom on anyone who may doubt it, and that we as a nation may be forced by our Government now to give up more of the freedom and many of the comforts that prevent the organisation of our war effort from approaching the 100 per cent mark. For we must sacrifice freedom to gain freedom.[87]

As suggested earlier, Simpson configures his memoir as reportage, creating agency and value by constructing himself as the active

bringer of news from behind enemy lines: the 'battlefront' of Vichy France. Finding himself paroled in Lyon, and now able to understand French, he reports that the town was 'literally humming with intrigue of every kind', describing the currents of De Gaullism, Pétainism and Communism shaping political opinion across the class spectrum.[88] He comments on radio listening habits, pro-British sentiment, varieties of French nationalism and modes of subversion.[89] Simpson – unregarded because of his injuries – is free to listen and absorb, and to generate a critical but affectionate portrait of France well suited to the rational tropes of British propaganda.

The observing self reappears in *The Way of Recovery*, albeit with a different focus. He records hospital discussions among a transnational community of the 'fighting class', with topics ranging from social security to Communism, striking a tone that somehow manages to conflate J. B. Priestley with the world of Rex Warner's *Aerodrome*.[90] Alongside this attempt to capture the reconstructive zeitgeist, Simpson says more about his own body and the medical interventions of the book's hero, McIndoe. Again, familiar man-making tropes are at play: plastic surgery is a form of highly technical work, constructing new faces from the ruins of the old, literally rebuilding men. McIndoe involves patients in the reconstruction process, turning Ward 3 into a site of active teamwork rather than passive salvation. Yet, Simpson does not let go of France. Rather, the nation is reimagined and deployed in an extreme instance of metaphorical man-making:

> I was obsessed by thoughts of France. She had become like a mistress whom I loved dearly, yet could not reach. I felt that I had deserted her, that I should never have returned to England and comfort until the war was over. These were serious feelings, and they still persist. … It seemed indecent to be well fed and putting on weight, to have plenty of tobacco to smoke, to have leisure and comfort, to feel an occasional glow of deep contentment. There, not so very far away, across the sea, lay France, prostrate under tyranny, and half starving. I loved

> France as a man loves a beautiful and intelligent mistress who has given him solace and understanding. My heart ached at the memory of the suffering I had seen there. … I felt the hunger and the hopelessness which French men and women were feeling.[91]

Simpson adopts a familiar array of gender stereotypes to articulate the feelings of exile, displacement and isolation that assailed him on his return to Britain.[92] He also follows the convention of gendering the nation as feminine and in need of the male agent's protection. His loyalty to France thus becomes an illicit affair alongside his conventional and legitimate marriage to England. Yet, this metaphor also does vital reconstitutive work. France, as passive womanhood, has been abandoned by the active male agent: Simpson is the betrayer in this clandestine love affair. He has left his mistress – and the shared pain of their relationship – for the banal comforts of England. It is a shameful act, but an act nonetheless.[93] Simpson turns from this extended metaphor to articulate his frustration that he cannot help the friends he left behind in France, before reiterating once more the power of writing, and his role as France's advocate: 'One thing only could I do, and that was write about France, so that as far as was in my power, I might present a case for her which would, perhaps, encourage sympathy for that great country among Englishmen and Americans.'[94] The feminised body of the French nation deflects attention from the dysfunctionality of the wounded male body and performs vital work in rehabilitating Simpson. Like the heroes of Hammond Innes, he once again has 'purpose' and, as with Richard Hillary's memorialisation of the long-haired boys, that purpose lies in the work of writing.[95]

Simpson himself came to recognise the complex role played by France in his psychic survival. Summarising his first book at the beginning of his third, he observes:

> I was extremely highly strung at this time, and I rapidly became French in outlook. This was due, I think, to associating my particular sufferings with those of the French people as a whole. It was a terrible time for Frenchmen, perhaps the most humiliating in all their history, and it was impossible to live among them without being deeply moved and sharing a part of their shame. This transference of much of my feeling played a part in keeping me from the madness of too much introspection. It helped me to preserve my sanity, prevented me from feeling too sorry for myself and left me free to sum up enough courage to go on trying to live.[96]

Fascinatingly, Simpson configures his otherness less through becoming disabled than through becoming French; and within this framework, he sees the humiliation of the French nation as more disabling than his physical wounds.[97] France's weakness is also, perversely, a benefit for Simpson: the territorial nation under occupation is more than usually feminised, and becomes, as I suggested earlier, an uncritical comforting mother to the wounded man; Simpson's self-analysis in *I Burned My Fingers* metaphorises the necessity of separating himself from this suffocating Frenchness and facing up to the public-school cold bath of British masculinity.[98]

Self-creation through imagined agency is thus essential to Simpson's memoir. But – as his identification with France indicates – community is equally important in the reconstruction of post-wound and postwar masculinity. From the community of France, Simpson moves to the community of Ward 3, and from there finally to the Guinea Pig Club. *I Burned My Fingers* concludes with a tribute to the Club and an explicit statement of 'common spirit' and the fortification of 'our common fate'.[99] Earlier in his writing, Simpson had bemoaned his loss of 'a definite place in the community of men', while simultaneously dreading a return to the contexts of his non-disabled past.[100] The psychological and communal structures of Ward 3 and the Guinea Pig Club thus constitute a homosocial

dimension of reconstruction that is vital to the negotiation of the veteran's dislocated subjectivity. Kate McLoughlin argues that 'in a sense, *all* returning veterans are imposters, in that they are expected in each case to be the same person as the one who went away'.[101] This uncanny impostorship is a significant literary trope, but the conspicuous visibility of disability troubles, or even inverts, this expectation. Part of Simpson's 'trouble' is that those he encounters in an ableist postwar world expect him to be different. His face is different, his hands are different: he has been through a scarcely communicable experience shared by few. He is not the same man who went away – he is evidently 'other' – yet, it is essential that he somehow persuades his interlocutors that he is that same man. This irreconcilable tension does much to explain the reiterative structure of Simpson's memoirs, their inconsistency and their 'gothic' quality. In narrating disfigurement, Simpson constructs the horror of confinement and misrecognition that is the fate of the incarcerated subject.

Simpson survives, and he does so in part through the construction of new communities of self-constitution, both homosocial and heterosexual. As the fictions of postwar thrillers and films suggest, the veteran all too easily becomes an isolated, alienated figure, welded to past loyalties, marginalised and insecure. Simpson, by contrast, succeeds in embedding himself within both the public male group and the private domestic ideal. He elides his past self, largely omitting it from discussion, and inscribes a new subjectivity, enacting Couser's contention that life-writing does not register, but rather creates, the self. Yet, such a process of reinvention is hard to control and Simpson's autobiographies, in particular *One of Our Pilots* and *The Way of Recovery*, have a radical incoherence that troubles confident teleological assumptions about the prosthetic agency of writing. Life-writing, it would seem, is harder to control than fiction as a man-making methodology, but its instability tells us much about the pressures of both uniformed subjectivity and domestic citizenship. Plotting the fictional reconstruction of the disabled body would superficially be easier, but

– as the next chapter will reveal – the actual matter of representing the wounded male body in British film and popular fictional cultures was far from straightforward.

[1] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, London: Verso, 1995, 106.

[2] Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, 131.

[3] 'Ivor Gates', in Nigel Balchin, *A Sort of Traitors* (1949), London: Collins, 1964, 129.

[4] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, 37. Bourke writes that 'nothing in British history (neither nineteenth-century wars nor in the grim injuries perpetrated upon the human body in the factories or mines) was adequate preparation for the physical devastation of the First World War' (33).

[5] Ibid., 35, 44.

[6] Ibid., 75.

[7] Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (1982), trans. William Sayers, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, 121.

[8] Ibid., 123.

[9] Ibid., 128.

[10] Kate McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790–2015*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 262–63.

[11] Although there is a growing literature on the historical and literary contexts of post–Second World War Britain, there is no comparable study to set alongside Bourke's analysis of the male body in the interwar years; indeed, the term 'disability' is a signifying absence from otherwise comprehensive studies such as Alan Allport's *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, and David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain: 1945–51*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007. American masculinities, by contrast, have received more substantial treatment, with studies of post-conflict embodiment emerging from historians such as David Gerber and David Serlin, who have, variously, analysed the relationship between disabled veterans and the state, the ideological appropriation of the wounded in the service of national narratives and the diverse strategies of re-masculinisation adopted by both veterans and public bodies. See David Gerber, 'Disabled Veterans, the State, and the Experience of Disability in Western Societies, 1914–1950', *Journal of Social History*, 36:4, 2003, 899–916, and David Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. American contexts are also more prominent in the discipline of disability studies. Valuable theoretical frameworks such as those of Rosemarie Garland Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 1997, and G. Thomas Couser's *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability and Life Writing*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, are shaped by the specific social and textual cultures of America, while Martin F. Norden's encyclopaedic *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, New

Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994, is, more precisely, a study of the representation of disability in Hollywood cinema.

[12] Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation*, 131. The rhetoric of a war against the unruly body, and disability as an enemy to be defeated, is shared by Britain and America, as the short film *Diary of a Sergeant* (1945) attests. Directed by Joseph M. Newman for the Army Pictorial Service, the narrative closes with a war bonds appeal by the Surgeon General of the US Army. Describing the film as the story of 'one man's fight to regain his place in society', he warns that, without support, these men will not 'win the struggle' to live a 'normal life' again.

[13] Tom Gleave ('R. A. F. Casualty'), *I Had a Row with a German* (1941), London: Macmillan, 1943, 107.

[14] Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 139; Emily Mayhew, *The Guinea Pig Club: Archibald McIndoe and the RAF in World War II* (2004), Barnsley: Greenhill Books, 2018, 34.

[15] See Mark Harrison, *Medicine and Victory: British Military Medicine in the Second World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 156–58.

[16] Mayhew, *The Guinea Pig Club*, 34.

[17] Ibid., 33–34.

[18] Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation*, 72.

[19] Ibid., 89.

[20] The significant contrast between Bader and Hodgkinson lies in their comparative status as pilots and as disabled men. Bader, an experienced and skilled career RAF pilot, had already been invalided out of the Air Force following an accident. Proficient at both walking and flying, he had the connections – and the aggressive personality – to talk his way back into military service. Hodgkinson, by contrast, was a barely trained Fleet Air Arm pilot whose rehabilitation and return to functionality took place within the parameters of wartime and involved the rewriting of the ninety-day rule, a regulation designed to pension off wounded men as cheaply as possible – irrespective of their prospects of recovery. The driving force behind the revision of the regulations was the plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe, who used Hodgkinson as a test case with a view to protecting the burn victims under his care. As a result of McIndoe's intervention, seriously wounded men were able to remain in uniform during extended treatment. See Colin Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward*, London: Odhams Press, 1957, 9-10, and Leonard Mosely, *Faces from the Fire: The Biography of Sir Archibald McIndoe*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, 122–25.

[21] Geoffrey Page, *Tale of a Guinea Pig: The Exploits of a World War II Fighter Pilot*, Canterbury: Wingham Press, 1981. The book is dedicated to Archie McIndoe, 'whose surgeon's fingers gave me back my pilot's hands'. Anderson notes that 80 per cent of McIndoe's patients returned to flying duty (*War, Disability and Rehabilitation*, 96, fn. 18). See also Mosely, *Faces from the Fire*, 125–35, and William Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, London: Putnam, 1955, 208–9. Other notable examples of the wartime redefinition of 'able-bodied' include James C. Nelson, an American in the RAF who lost a leg in 1945 and continued to work as a test

pilot, and James MacLachlan, whose left arm was amputated below the elbow in February 1941. He was certified fit to fly again in August 1941, became a night fighter, was promoted to squadron leader and died in action on 31 July 1943.

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[22] This does not simply refer to disability; as historians of both world wars have demonstrated, it applied on a nationwide scale to conceptions of gender and women's roles. See Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, and Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, London: Pandora, 1987.

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[23] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 115.

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[24] Ibid.

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[25] Serlin, *Replaceable You*, 35, 33. Serlin argues that in postwar America, the silent bodies of amputees were 'transformed' by the media 'into powerful visual and rhetorical symbols through which war-related disability was unequivocally identified with heroism' (30). As I go on to discuss, the British context was more subdued. It should also be noted that there were limits to America's willingness to revalorise the disabled body. The brain-injured, semi-paralysed figure at the heart of MacKinlay Kantor's *Glory for Me* (1945), commissioned by Samuel Goldwyn for the veteran reintegration film that would become *The Best Years of Our Lives*, was judged a 'cinematic impossibility' (David Gerber, 'Heroes and Misfits: The Troubled Social Reintegration of Disabled Veterans in *The Best Years of Our Lives*', *American Quarterly*, 46:4, 1994, 556; Harold Russell, *Victory in My Hands*, London: John Lehmann, 1950, 139–40). The perception that there was an 'acceptable'

mode of wounding is reinforced by the airman Richard Hillary's propaganda tour of the USA. Hillary's burn-scarred appearance was considered too disturbing for public display, and he was confined to radio broadcasts (Michael Burn, *Mary and Richard: The Story of Richard Hillary and Mary Booker*, London: André Deutsch, 1988, 25–26).

[26] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage, 1995, 8, 6.

[27] Allport, *Demobbed*, 11–12; McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics*, 267–68.

[28] In arguing that there are significant differences between the American and British contexts, I do not mean to dismiss the pressures on US veterans to prove their social utility. Serlin makes this pressure abundantly clear in his discussion of the workplace (*Replaceable You*, 40–42). The representation of disabled veterans is, though, inextricably linked to ideals of national identity which in turn ensure that, in this period, the British veteran is a more muted figure than his American counterpart.

[29] Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (1983), 2nd ed., Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2008, 76.

[30] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, 47.

[31] Exceptions include horror and science fiction films, which enable a different negotiation of the damaged body (see *The Quatermass Xperiment*, 1955), and the representation of villains. The 1949 melodrama *Silent Dust*, for example, indicates the depth

of anxieties about the returning veteran and a characteristic use of 'narrative prosthesis'. A scarred veteran 'hero' returns from the dead and is revealed as a deserter, thief, black marketeer, blackmailer and murderer. Interestingly, the agent of vengeance against the unwelcome residue of war is the soldier's blind civilian father, who must abandon his belief in his son's idealised military past. Disabled villains would also play a significant role in fiction, most obviously in the widely noted deployment of physically as well as psychologically grotesque bodies in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels.

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[32] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, New York: New York University Press, 2006, 31.

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[33] Ibid., 10.

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[34] It is perhaps inevitable that one of the few stories not to tell a tale of heteronormativity is that of Gladys M. Bird ('School-teacher'). There are only two women contributors to the volume, one of whom (the 'horsewoman' Lis Hartel) was already married and a mother before contracting polio in 1944. Her recovery and medal-winning performance at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics is a remarkable story, but it – like the multiple supportive wives – contrasts strongly with Bird's narrative. Paralysed in an accident at the age of twenty-one, she endured eight frustrating years of immobility before being referred to Stoke Mandeville Hospital, where the spinal injury pioneer Ludwig Guttman suggested, for the first time, the concept of a 'future'. She successfully returned to teaching in a wheelchair, but the heteronormative rehabilitation so central to the male narratives is conspicuous by its absence.

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[35] Russell, *Victory in My Hands*, 93. Charley is Charles McGonegal, a double hand amputee from the First World War, who had

married and built a successful business. He featured in the training film *Meet McGonegal*, which was used to assist the rehabilitation of Second World War veterans. Russell, in turn, would appear in *Diary of a Sergeant* (1945), which updated the earlier film by showing a young, recently wounded man instead of a comfortable middle-aged one (126). See earlier, Note 12.

[36] Ibid., 135.

[37] See G. Thomas Couser, 'Signifying Selves: Disability and Life Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability*, eds. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 203–04.

[38] David Gerber, 'Anger and Affability: The Rise and Representation of a Repertory of Self-Presentation Skills in a World War II Disabled Veteran', *Journal of Social History*, 27:1, 1993, 10, 6.

[39] See Mayhew, *The Guinea Pig Club*, Chapters 2 and 3, for an account of airman's burn, the particular medical challenges it presented and the treatment debates that ensued.

[40] Tom Gleave, quoted in Peter Williams and Ted Harrison, *McIndoe's Army: The Injured Airmen Who Faced the World*, London: Pelham Books, 1979, 23.

[41] G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 14.

[42] Edward Bishop, *McIndoe's Army* (1963), London: Grub Street,

2001, 3.

[43] By 1945, the Guinea Pigs numbered some 649 Allied aircrew, and the Club had become a registered charity working to support its members through a magazine, *The Guinea Pig*, and its annual 'Lost Weekend' reunions. The last official reunion was held in 2007, but the Club – while no longer a charity – will persist until there are only two Guinea Pigs left (and able, it must be hoped, to raise a glass). At the time of writing, five Pigs remain. Gerber, writing about the relationship between disabled veterans and the state, observes that while state assistance is essential to veteran recovery, it is equally 'inimical to the independence and self-confidence, and hence the manhood, of the disabled man' ('Disabled Veterans', 901). The Guinea Pig Club, which will be discussed more fully in the Coda, was from the outset directed by the Guinea Pigs themselves.

[44] Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 195.

[45] Most of the memoirs and autobiographies considered in this chapter are influenced by Hillary, their debt manifest across a range from sincere tribute to probably unwitting plagiarism. In a remarkable example of textual homage, Hodgkinson, who had met Hillary on several occasions, recounts a formative friendship with a more mature, secure and religiously minded fellow pilot. He then proceeds to interrogate his friend's motivation and belief along lines remarkably similar to Hillary's interrogation of his mature, religiously minded friend Peter Pease (*Best Foot Forward*, 49–53). This echo does much to indicate that Hillary's self-conscious philosophical wrangling was far from exceptional. A comparison of these otherwise diverse memoirs also reveals much about the psychology of injury. Hodgkinson, like Hillary, feels that his

injuries, and consequent exemption from combat, render him 'an imposter' (91). Francis provides a thoughtful comparison of five narratives of wounded flyers – Hillary, Hodgkinson, Bader, Simpson and Page – as 'parables of remasculinization' (*The Flyer*, 133).

[46] Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (1942), London: Pimlico, 1997, 6.

[47] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 40.

[48] Couser, *Recovering Bodies*, 183. This is one of the many elements that distinguishes Hillary's work from other East Grinstead writers such as William Simpson and Tom Gleave. In their accounts, McIndoe emerges as the heroic agent who enables the protagonist to be restored to agency. In Gleave's case, he even returns the critically injured and permanently disfigured pilot to active service.

[49] In *McIndoe's Army*, a compendium of Guinea Pig mini-biographies, Williams and Harrison observe that one of 'the unofficial rules of membership of the [Guinea Pig] Club is that you do not boast of your own achievements. It is quite permitted, however, to boast about the achievements of fellow Guinea Pigs' (81).

[50] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, 15.

[51] Ibid., 166–67.

[52] Ibid., 172.

[53] Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War*, 40–43.

[54] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, 178.

[55] Ibid., 49.

[56] Despite the gravity of his injuries, but like many similarly wounded men, Hillary felt compelled to return to operational flying. His life story has been read as a case study of the deadly compulsions of heroism, most notably in a memorial essay by Arthur Koestler, 'The Birth of a Myth', *Horizon*, April 1943. The mythologisation of Hillary is discussed by Burn, *Mary and Richard*; Sebastian Faulks, *The Fatal Englishman*, London: Hutchinson, 1996; Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (2009), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; and Rawlinson, who, in his insightful analysis of *The Last Enemy* and its reception, calls Hillary 'the Rupert Brooke of the 1940s' (*British Writing of the Second World War*, 40).

[57] The challenge facing young men who had moved directly from school to war is addressed in both fiction and autobiography of the period. See Nevil Shute's 1947 novel *The Chequerboard*, London: Vintage, 2009, 65, 312–16; Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 234; Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward*, 216.

[58] The titles of memoirs and biographies from the period are marked by conflicting cultural imperatives: the inspirational/didactic/propagandist – epitomised by William Simpson's *The Way of Recovery* and Russell's *Victory in My Hands* (1950) – and the modest/bathetic/humorous, a mode of naming that emerges from middle-class discourses of understatement and euphemism. Examples include Gleave's *I Had a Row with a*

German (1941) and double leg amputee Hodgkinson's *Best Foot Forward* (1957).

[59] William Simpson, *One of Our Pilots Is Safe*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1942, 86.

[60] Ibid., 95.

[61] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 205.

[62] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944, 37.

[63] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 73.

[64] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 61.

[65] Gleave writes of his arrival in hospital: 'From that moment I started to accumulate a debt that mounted daily, and still mounts; a debt I can never repay, against which human thanks seem utterly inadequate' (*I Had a Row with a German*, 75).

[66] Peter Weeks, reviewing the book for *The Guinea Pig*, agreed. *I Burned My Fingers* is the work of a writer who has 'learned his trade', whereas the appeal of Simpson's earlier books was 'topical rather than literary' (Issue 27, Christmas 1955, 8).

[67] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 35. '[I]t had been exciting', Simpson adds, a few pages later, 'in that topsy-turvy world to sense a return of part of my manhood. Passions were easily stirred in an atmosphere of confusion and danger … I had been through

the tests and knew that I now had, if anything, a certain added attraction' (46).

[68] McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics*, 110.

[69] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 9.

[70] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 131–32. Simpson's use of the term 'subnormal' gives some indication of the extent of the challenge faced by the disabled and disfigured in the 1940s. While war might have made the sight of damaged men more familiar, it did so in a context still fundamentally prejudiced against the display of unruly or non-conforming bodies. A casual comment by Hodgkinson is indicative. Getting used to being seen in public in his legless state, he consoles himself by comparison: 'this, I told myself, was to be only temporary. And I wasn't grotesque. Compared with some of the men I saw later at East Grinstead I was seemly' (*Best Foot Forward*, 90).

[71] Stiker, *A History of Disability*, 129.

[72] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, 43.

[73] This was a language favoured by the Guinea Pig Club and consciously deployed by Archibald McIndoe. In his 'Maestro's Message' prefacing the tenth issue of *The Guinea Pig*, he announces 'I think I can say with confidence that, apart from a few reconditioning jobs, new liners, reboring, decoking and so forth, hospital life is ended for all Guinea Pigs' (Christmas 1949, 3).

[74] McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics*, 25.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Simpson, *One of Our Pilots*, 105, 106.

[77] Couser, 'Signifying Selves', 204–05, 206.

[78] Couser suggests that these tropes work primarily to 'offer (false) reassurance to the nondisabled', who exist in a state of fear that they might at any point find themselves joining 'the only minority that members of the majority can join at any time' (Ibid., 203). The circumstances of the Second World War both endorse and confound this proposition: the combination of combat and the bombing of civilians ensured that seldom has the risk of becoming disabled been greater, but equally, the circumstances of RAF wounding can be folded into a pre-existing mythology of exceptionality surrounding 'the few'. At least during the war years, how disability is achieved – the uniform it wears – changes the public perception of that bodily difference. This sheds interesting light on Hillary's epiphanic ending: the linking of his disfigurement to the quotidian wounding of a Blitzed civilian is once again a deflection, absorbing Hillary's conspicuous difference into a rhetoric of the people's war and the people's wounding.

[79] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 280–81. Simpson pays tribute to his 'fellow Guinea Pigs … who have invaded society on all fronts and are doing exactly what I am trying to do' (280).

[80] Simpson, *One of Our Pilots*, 229.

[81] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 46; Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 29.

[82] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 30.

[83] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 269.

[84] Couser, *Memoir*, 14.

[85] Simpson, *One of Our Pilots*, 97.

[86] Ibid., 98.

[87] Ibid., 230.

[88] Ibid., 176.

[89] Ibid., 177.

[90] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 89–93. My reference here is to Priestley's socialist reformist agenda, epitomised by his demobilisation novel *Three Men in New Suits* (1945) and Rex Warner's absurdist allegory of fascist techno-futurity *The Aerodrome* (1941).

[91] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 57.

[92] Ibid., 29.

[93] The value of this self-assertion might also be considered in the light of the collapse of his first marriage, which follows from his wife's inadequate response to the first sight of her 'smelly, offensive … dirtily bandaged and clumsily disabled' husband (Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 53). With the value of hindsight, Simpson concedes both that she had not been told what to expect and that he shared responsibility for the failure of the marriage in his refusal to forgive her initial transgression (54–57).

[94] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 58. Simpson's investment in his observing self continues into the postwar. His first, quite belated, contribution to *The Guinea Pig* is headlined 'Bill Simpson Saw the – Berlin Airlift' (Christmas 1950, 25–27).

[95] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, 178.

[96] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 23–24.

[97] This configuration of 'psychic' wounding can be compared to Hillary's encounter with his pacifist friend, discussed earlier.

[98] In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Davis observes the intimate connection between physical bodies and national identity, arguing that the rise of industrialism and capitalism, with their reliance upon mechanics of standardised production, equally saw the emergence of new discourses of corporeal conformity, statistical norms and eugenics. An 'able body is the body of a citizen', Davis concludes, and those bodies that do not conform are excluded from the 'body politic' (71–72). The unquestioned equation of wholeness and belonging in representations of the national body speaks persuasively to the

desire to achieve ‘normativity’ articulated in Simpson’s teleological progress towards domestic citizenship.

[99] Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, 281.

[100] Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 14.

[101] McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics*, 24.

Chapter 5

Unrepresentable Wounds

Nevil Shute, Hammond Innes and the Legacies of Damage

◈

> The [Medusa] story is a kind of allegory of a 'normal' person's intersection with the disabled body. The intersection is marked by the power of the visual. The 'normal' person sees the disabled person and is turned to stone, in some sense, by the visual interaction. In this moment, the normal person suddenly feels self-conscious, rigid, unable to look but equally drawn to look. The visual field becomes problematic, dangerous, treacherous. The disability becomes a power derived from its otherness, its monstrosity, in the eyes of the 'normal' person.[1]

William Simpson's repeated self-accounting is, at various stages, remarkable both for its avoidance of and its engagement with representations of the wounded male body. That he engages at all is striking: postwar fiction, even when deploying a disabled protagonist, was coy about the details of what it might mean to live

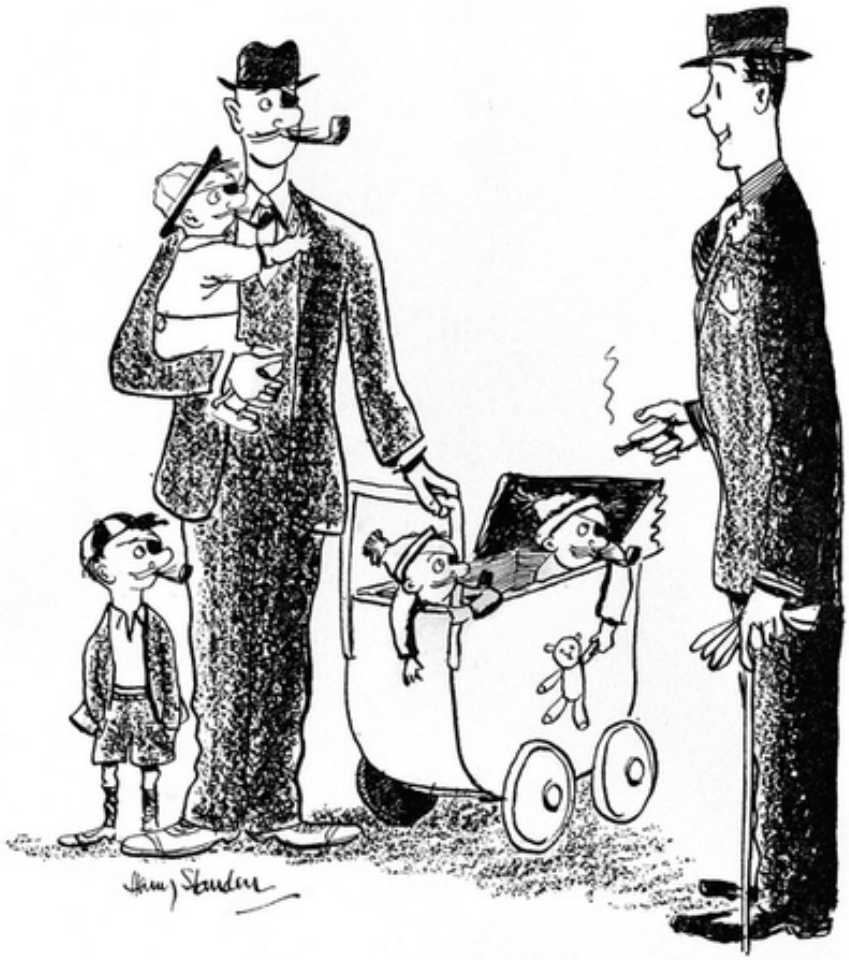
with a non-normative body. For the most part, novels and feature films took an evasive approach to male damage, variously denying, displacing or romantically reconfiguring broken bodies and irreparable injuries. The wounded male body thus became simultaneously central and marginal: acknowledged but overwritten by reassuring narratives of recovery, agency or – in some cases – sacrificial death. These displacements take multiple forms but nearly always function, to a lesser or greater extent, as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder term a 'narrative prosthesis', 'an opportunistic metaphorical device' that draws attention not to disability itself but to some other state or transition.[2] Above all, though, these bodies and plots seek to reassure and to comfort, and are integral to the normalising imperatives of the postwar.

Mitchell and Snyder begin their influential account of narrative prosthesis with an anecdote about a Japanese scholar who is caught unawares by the 'pervasive nature of disabled images in national literatures', including his own.[3] Adjusting his perspective, he finds that examples abound, leading Mitchell and Snyder to conclude that 'readers tend to filter a multitude of disability figures absently through their imaginations'.[4] The Second World War and its aftermath presents a similar paradigm: the representation of disability is simultaneously ubiquitous and occluded. While it appears across a range of popular fictions, it is seldom directly confronted, and when it does come centre stage, it encodes tensions and anxieties particular to the evolving contexts of the period. The wound that initiates this project – Sammy Rice's missing foot in Nigel Balchin's *The Small Back Room* – sets the tone for disability's symbolic wartime work. In Balchin's novel, the damaged male body becomes a means of metaphorising the 'wounds' of non-combatant masculinity. Sammy's foot and his crushing inferiority complex exist in a deeply uncomfortable and seemingly insoluble symbiosis. His skills, knowledge and courage – even his desirability – cannot overwrite his lack of corporeal integrity: the fact that he is not fit for soldiering, the archetypal work of war. Balchin is unusually

confrontational in his assertion of normativity's coercive power, and disability is more typically – and reassuringly – deployed in another wartime text: H. E. Bates's *Fair Stood the Wind for France* (1944). In this account of an injured bomber pilot trapped in occupied France, amputation is figured as only a temporary disabling of masculinity: a condition from which Franklin, the pilot, can recover, and a loss which will be compensated. Franklin may have lost an arm, but he can still enjoy the rewards of heteronormativity and reciprocated desire. Indeed, as he prepares to escape France with the idealised and idealistic young Frenchwoman Françoise – nearly always referred to as 'the girl' – she turns to him 'with a great unbroken gaze of adoration'.[5] The damaged body is rendered almost divine by the prosthetic context of war, and the wound itself becomes a uniform for the no longer combatant body.

The process of repair enacted in *Fair Stood the Wind for France* conforms neatly to the twentieth-century paradigm of replacement proposed by Henri-Jacques Stiker, but this compensatory framework alone cannot account for the sheer proliferation of fictional wounds in the postwar period – nor for the symbolic work they perform. In this context, it is useful to turn to the broader history of literary disability and the representational conventions surrounding what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the 'extraordinary' body. Thomson's influential analysis seeks to interrogate disability's role in the construction and maintenance of the 'normate', a term she coins to designate the culturally acceptable – and authoritative – figure made possible by the exclusion of deviant others.[6] Thomson focuses on women writers whose 'ambivalent and unstable' depictions of disability enable a movement from 'pathology to identity' and a counternarrative capable of challenging the 'ideal American self', yet she acknowledges that such complex deployments are themselves exceptional. Far more common, she finds, are representations of disability that obscure 'the complexities in favor of the rhetorical or symbolic potential of the prototypical disabled figure, who often functions as a lightning rod for the pity, fear, discomfort, guilt, or

sense of normalcy of the reader or a more significant character'.[7] Within this framework, disabled characters become the locus of troubling ambiguities; defined by lack, their anomalous embodiments resist categorisation, and they all too often signify danger. Disability needs explaining or containing via narratives that account for deformity and reassure their readership that lack is not contagious.[8] But this is not the only archetypal framework within which the disabled body has been figured, nor the only trouble generated by literary representations of impairment. Indeed, argues Ato Quayson, when it comes to disability, 'literature refracts social attitudes and sometimes renders them even more complicated than they are in reality'.[9]



"Are they all yours, old man?"

Illustration 5.1 'Are they all yours, old man?' *The Guinea Pig*, April 1951

The immediate postwar years provide a vivid endorsement of arguments concerning the elastic prosthetic uses to which disability can be put. Fictional wounds variously mobilise ethical debate, metaphorise the challenges of demobilisation and symbolise anxieties regarding other, less tangible, forms of psychic and social damage. Impairments also figure the conflicting discourses of man-making circulating in the transition from war to 'peace'. In the discussion that follows, I map the uses and abuses of disability across a range of popular narratives and consider its value in the ongoing process of postwar man-making and the constitution of domestic citizenship.

Normalising Disability in the Postwar

As the war draws to a close, the symbolic work undertaken by male damage comes increasingly to figure states of transition and the disjuncture between pre-war and postwar selves. In Helen MacInnes's thriller *Horizon* (1945), for example, the protagonist Peter Lennox carries a physical wound that symbolises his state of psychic dislocation: although first encountered as a POW in Italy, he is more fully confined by the loss of his pre-war self. A pacifist-leaning painter before the war, the wound he nurses disables his right hand, cutting him adrift from a subjectivity that can never be reconstituted. Indeed, it is only when he fully accepts the sacrifice of this self for the greater good of the war – choosing to stay fighting in the Tyrol rather than seeking medical intervention – that he is able, counterintuitively, to heal. Wartime and postwar imperatives are combined in his recognition 'he was cured. He could think of the future'.[10] As was the case with H. E. Bates's amputee flyer, the recognition of community and self-assertion of choice turn the wounded man into a newly virile masculine agent and, by way of reward, the novel holds out the promise of domestic citizenship: a waiting woman and left-handed painting. MacInnes is optimistic and

imagines her damaged hero reborn. Other writers were less certain that the social, psychic and somatic wounds of war could so easily be healed. As the machinations of Ivor Gates indicate, Nigel Balchin had little faith in suffering's capacity to enable let alone ennoble; but Gates at least enjoyed the comforts of malicious agency: in Balchin's earlier novel, *Mine Own Executioner* (1945), the veteran Adam Lucian lacks even that. Returning with both mind and body impaired, he cannot be recuperated by well-intentioned psychoanalysis, nor by the comforts of heteronormativity. And he, like Gates, ends up dead.[11] Yet, although the narrative trajectories of Lucian and Gates are far from reassuring, their stories are embedded within reconstructive plots. Neither character is the protagonist; rather, they function to enable what Robert McRuer terms 'epiphanic' insights, and renewed relationships, among the novels' recuperable normative subjects.[12]

It is not unusual for disability to act as an object lesson for society, or for disabled characters to act as ethical benchmarks calibrating the virtues of the normative subject. Indeed, tracing the trope of moral testing back to the Loathly Lady of medieval literature, Quayson observes this 'particular form of disability representation to be so ubiquitous as to be almost universal'.[13] But in the postwar context, paradigms of marginalisation and ethical improvement are, in a number of fictions, themselves disrupted by the presence of first-person disabled narrators.[14] These fluent, capable voices trouble assumptions of the disorderly or helpless disabled body, while simultaneously deflecting the gaze from the spectacle of non-conforming corporeality, a disembodied centrality that is also a perversely direct iteration of the period's characteristic refusal to look. In Agatha Christie's *The Rose and the Yew Tree* (1947), for example, the aftermath of war is plotted through the radically transformed perspective of the newly disabled narrator Hugh Norreys. Having survived the war unscathed, Norreys returns to his peacetime occupation of teaching, only to suffer life-changing injuries in a car accident. Abruptly transferred from active agent to

passive onlooker, he assumes the stance of an ironic commentator superintending the spectacle of postwar reconstruction, while telling the story of a non-disabled veteran, Major John Gabriel, VC. Christie's novel is sharply observant of social mores, making comedy out of the conventions of male inarticulacy and romance plotting, while conducting an intersectional analysis of class and gender politics in a changing world. Gabriel, it turns out, *is* wounded: his working-class origins irreparably disable him and are only held in abeyance by the temporary signifying power of his Victoria Cross (VC).[15] His outsider perspective, however, makes him an insightful observer of how bodies are read, as is evident in his suggestion that the conventional Norreys make capital out of his disability by letting women assume he was wounded in combat. The right sort of wound, Gabriel implies, can give cultural value even to the broken male body, making the 'invalid' both legible and legitimate.[16] Yet, Hugh does not take up Gabriel's suggestion, nor take any action to pursue his own romantic interests. Instead, he insists, repeatedly, that this is not his story and keeps the frustrations of his condition at arm's length through the focus on Gabriel's rise and fall. Nonetheless, even as Norreys emphasises his marginality, his disability pervades the text: in his reaction to the pity of 'thwarted maternity', in his suicide planning, in his eventual reinvigoration through the restorative power of homosociality and in the energy he gains from his vicarious engagement with Gabriel's life and lusts.[17] *The Rose and the Yew Tree* was one of Christie's 'Mary Westmacott' novels, fictions that do not conform to her customary generic patterns but rather interrogate the discomforts of mid-century manners. They seldom end happily, and this is no exception; but Christie – who had built her career on the configuration of outsider agents[18] – permits her disabled narrator to survive into authoritative cultural masculinity. The redundant war hero Gabriel, by contrast, cannot be reassimilated, disappearing into pseudonymity and sacrifice in an ill-defined European hinterland where the masculinity of risk is still rewarded.

Norreys's damaged body is largely kept from view, hidden under rugs and attended to by servants. His disability is decorous and dignified, and he retains the economic agency of his class; not all disabled figures enjoyed such privileges, and the often grotesquely depicted bodies of the damaged rank and file haunt the margins of postwar fiction. When the disabled body sheds its respectable cloak of invisibility, it becomes a clear enactment of the ethical function discussed by Quayson: a moral test for other characters and for the reader. In John Lodwick's *Peal of Ordnance* (1947), the disorientated protagonist Tamplin emerges from a period of amnesia (in which he has blown up the Albert Memorial, the War Office and the BBC) to find himself resident in a discreetly sequestered home for disabled ex-servicemen. The function of this chapter within an otherwise action-packed thriller is hard to determine, but it speaks to Lodwick's broader concern with the betrayal of veterans by a postwar society all too ready to forget the cost of war. To make this point, however, it uses the disabled body to prompt epiphanic awareness in the character of Tamplin, and presumably within at least some of the novel's readership. The men Tamplin meets are trapped in a homosocial limbo outside time, their enforced passivity rendering them objects to be stared at, the aggregate parts of a sentient war memorial that no one will see. There is an educational purpose here, which emerges alongside the familiar postwar preoccupation with the dignity, necessity and man-making properties of work. The disabled men dedicate their mornings to basket work and tapestry, achieving 'a very high level of skill … as of course was only to be expected with such constant practice and the absence of other distractions'.[19] In that telling 'absence of other distractions', however, the agency of work is undermined by an assertion of emasculation. These are men who cannot be reintegrated into heteronormative society; they are too dysfunctional and disturbing (one has quite literally been castrated). The book struggles to know how to represent this spectacular excess, both presenting and withholding the stars of its freak show. Tamplin is taken to see Charlie, who has lost all four limbs and seldom receives visitors. Glad

of the company, he becomes a prosaic iteration of saintly suffering, cheerfully performing the trick of writing with his mouth; by contrast, Bert, whose internal injuries invisibly disable him, refuses compliance. His poorly executed tapestries insist on depicting 'sombre memories of battle … unsuitable for sale' by charitable organisations, and he dedicates his time to working out how much money his care will cost the government before his inevitable early death.[20] Nevertheless, the quadruple amputee Charlie is not the limit case of representation: that honour belongs to the closed ward of faceless men, apparently so horrific to behold that they have scared away the hospital's 'sky-pilot'.[21] The disabled in this novel thus function as a perverse semiotic eruption – the resurgence of a traumatic past – forcing their way into a text where they have no logical narrative purpose. They are not part of society, nor are they yet its criminal other. No space of textual emplotment makes sense of them, or integrates them into the normative structures of domestic citizenship.

Much the same might be argued of the 'ex-serviceman's band' of the disfigured and dysfunctional who form Jack Havoc's gang in Margery Allingham's crime novel *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952). These seemingly chaotic, disorderly beggars, hidden in plain sight as a perambulating freak show, occupy an underground cavern kept in a state of pristine military order, a residual homosociality that signifies their ongoing allegiance to the violence of war.[22] The grotesque body once again becomes a symbolic representation of social disorder and ethical ambiguity, but there is – at least for Allingham's band – the consolation of criminal agency and a mutually supportive counterculture. Indeed, crime fiction, across its many subgenres, provided a welcome home for the damaged veteran, who might easily appear as the hero of a thriller or a threat to society in the emergent form of the police procedural.[23] In the formula's repurposing of violence, visible wounds encoded necessary qualities of courage, resilience and threat. Ian Fleming's disfigured Sir Hugo Drax in *Moonraker* (1955) and the disabled Dr No are one

side of the coin; the more discretely scarred James Bond and Alastair Maclean's battered, limping Pierre Cavell in *The Satan Bug* (1962) the other.[24] Disability permeates romance too, from the bedridden amputee soldier at the heart of Monica Dickens's *The Happy Prisoner* (1946) to the damaged veterans negotiating the social 'wound' of homosexuality in Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* (1953). Significantly, in Renault's radical romance, there is no stigma around disability; indeed, in the context of war, it operates to distinguish appropriately manly homosexuals from their abject feminine others.

Renault, a wartime nurse, offers an unusually intimate and detailed depiction of the vulnerable wounded body and the challenge of physical rehabilitation. This level of realism was not possible in the cinema, where representational conventions and censorship practices ensured that damage, while pervasive, was rather more abstractly configured.[25] Johanna Laitila has drawn attention to the trope of amnesia that repeatedly shapes the plots of popular melodramas and links these narratives of forgetting to tensions surrounding postwar readjustment.[26] This is evidently the case in *The October Man* (1947), a demobilisation drama that conspicuously doesn't mention the war. Rather, it shapes a compelling paranoid thriller out of a bus crash, a murder and a disorientated wounded hero who must assert his fitness for work and the rewards of domestic citizenship. When Jim Ackland (John Mills) is released from hospital, he is in a precarious state: anxious, self-doubting and still dealing with the trauma of a head injury and a child's death. He finds restorative agency through work and romance, but when a murder occurs, his history of damage condemns him in the eyes of a bitter, suspicious community that embodies postwar society's fears of veteran violence. The police doubt him too, encapsulating cultural distrust in a succinct exchange: he 'seems alright' observes one investigating officer; 'yes, but they always do, don't they' replies his cynical counterpart. Ackland is left to reinstate his masculine agency by solving the crime himself, aided only by the prosthetic support of his loyal girlfriend. But although the film offers a conventional happy

ending, promising heteronormative bliss and health-giving employment while banishing the past and its memories, the film's dark palate and denuded, claustrophobic atmosphere do little to reassure that the psychological damage of war can be articulated, let alone effectively treated.[27]

The anxiety surrounding damaged minds needed expert attention, and cinema imagined some answers might lie in psychoanalysis, but – as was the case with society more broadly – its embrace of the discourse was at best ambivalent.[28] Ealing's disturbing portmanteau horror, *Dead of Night* (1945), resists the explicatory power of analysis in the strongest possible terms. The sceptical Dr Van Stratton ends up murdered in a cyclical nightmare that refuses resolution and suggests that war persists as a cultural time bomb, resident in even the most unlikely of suspects. *The Seventh Veil* (1945), by contrast, embraces the healing potential of psychoanalysis, but does so by transposing trauma onto the feminine: by focusing on female vulnerability, attention is deflected from male anxieties even as their inarticulable pressure is tacitly acknowledged. Hence, while the protagonist Francesca Cunningham (Ann Todd), rendered suicidal by the unreconcilable demands of her career as a concert pianist and the romance of domesticity, is analysed back to health, no explanation is given for the limp that afflicts her psychologically controlling, emotionally abusive and – on one occasion – physically violent guardian Nicholas (James Mason). Rather, the spectator is offered a range of hermeneutic hints ranging from a lack of talent to maternal wounding (a curmudgeonly bachelor, he lives under the looming portrait of his dead mother). In the film's resolution, however, he becomes another man forgiven for inflicting violence on women: Francesca chooses the sado-masochistic pleasures of Nicholas, and her career, over the men who would offer her only conventional femininity. In *The Seventh Veil*, Herbert Lom's psychoanalyst Dr Larsen has a reassuring capacity to heal, but the medical profession receives even stronger endorsement in its management of the period's most richly imagined damaged mind: that of Squadron Leader Peter Carter in *A Matter of Life and*

Death (1946). Powell and Pressburger's spectacular envisioning of postwar reconstruction through a technicolour present and a monochrome afterlife is a potent resurrection fantasy.[29] Escaping seemingly inevitable death, Peter Carter is saved through medical skill, but the film's hallucinatory imagination translates this into a combination of timely homosocial sacrifice, bureaucratic accident and the healing power of love. Peter is needed for reconstruction and his survival symbolises both postwar reconciliation and the new priorities of domestic citizenship.

The physical wounds of war were less likely to attract the attention of the medical profession and were, for the most part, distilled into the easily representable form of limps and scars that could be 'healed' within the structures of domestic citizenship and work. A compelling example is provided by the 1948 thriller *The Small Voice*, which richly combines veteran anxiety with a narrative of rehabilitative man-making. A couple driving home at night help the victims of a car crash, only to find they are criminal former soldiers who have broken out of Dartmoor and killed a policeman. These men, devoid of self-control, represent the much-feared residue of wartime aggression that haunted postwar society and, true to type, they proceed to hold the good Samaritans hostage in their remote Welsh home, along with two children who were collateral damage of the crash. One of these develops meningitis, giving a time-critical dimension to the struggle between kidnappers and captives. Both plot and performance encapsulate the tensions of postwar gender reconstruction. Playwright and war veteran Murray Byrne, played against type by the reliable domestic citizen James Donald, is bitter and cynical. Having lost a leg in captivity, he accuses his wife Eleanor (Valerie Hobson) of only staying with him out of pity; she, in turn, is exhausted by her husband's hostility, and unable to make him believe that she would have welcomed him back from Germany 'with no legs at all'. Eleanor's assertion that Murray's disability does not matter is absolutely on script for narratives of reconstruction, but her words are complicated by the presence of Boke, the leader of their captors, played by the charismatic American

actor Howard Keel. Introducing an American into the postwar landscape instantly complicates the power dynamics – resentments around American soldiers' cultural and financial capital lingered long in British memory – but equally problematic is the juxtaposition of two contrasting modes of masculinity. Boke is imposing, walking with a swagger in a loose shirt tucked in to reveal the gun in his waistband, a vision of potency in comparison with the tightly buttoned, ironic and cerebral Murray, who mocks himself for not being able to do something 'suitably heroic', keeps his jacket on in a heatwave and seeks to defeat the criminals through psychological warfare. Within the noir framework of the film, it is not entirely clear whether Murray's disability is his missing leg or his superior intellect, but when Eleanor attempts to escape, he is further emasculated. Recaptured by Boke, Eleanor is forcibly kissed and told that she 'has all the guts in the family'.

Ultimately, the escape strategies of both Murray and Eleanor begin to bear fruit, but any suggestion that a man might triumph or masculinity be restored without physical violence is undone by the film's conclusion. Taking a gun from a drunken henchman, Eleanor tells her husband that he must use it to kill Boke and save the suffering child, whose off-camera screams are a genuinely disturbing dimension of the film. As will be discussed later in this chapter, it is crucial for postwar reassurance regarding the pathology of demobilised soldiers that the hero does not kill in cold blood: Murray – caught between the irreconcilable forces of conventional re-masculinisation and domestic citizenship – is saved by the safety catch. Although an ex-soldier, he is not a competent killer; indeed, he has already regressed to a state of unfamiliarity with the weapons of war. When he does eventually shoot Boke, the cornered criminal is pointing his gun at the vulnerable child. Boke effectively commits suicide; Murray is licensed to kill. Through this tightrope negotiation of agency and legitimacy, the wounded man regains his wife and his self-respect; but for all his rehabilitation, there is no resurgent desire. The sexual tension evident in the encounters between Boke and Eleanor is as much a residue of wartime as the

soldiers' criminality, and the marital order restored at the film's end is companionate, not passionate. There is no kiss, only a gentle embrace and new plans for the garden.

Such an ending speaks to the muted formulations of national sexualities, but it also suggests that disability and desire cannot quite be reconciled and that there are limits to the screen representation of impairment. Indeed, sometimes the only agency available to disabled characters is sacrificial, as in *Broken Journey* (1948). A plane crashes in the Alps, and among the desperate stranded passengers, at risk of freezing or starving to death, is a man in an iron lung. As the prospect of rescue comes to look increasingly dire, and with little ceremony beyond a kiss from his nurse, he donates the battery from his lung to the radio and sacrifices his life for the good of the non-disabled community.

As this brief survey suggests, while the psychic and somatic imprint of war pervades postwar popular narratives, the actual representation of damage remains evasive and the experience of disability is minimised. It is as if fiction, like the 'normal' person in Davis's medusa analogy, finds itself 'self-conscious, rigid, unable to look but equally drawn to look'.[30] Mired in cultural embarrassment, fiction refuses to stare, and there is no William Simpson to call it out by staring, unflinchingly, back.[31] Nowhere is this more evident than in the work of Nevil Shute, and in the following, I explore the narrative strategies through which male damage is imagined, deflected and repaired in *A Town Like Alice* (1950) and *Requiem for a Wren* (1955).

A Home Fit for Heroes? Nevil Shute's Strategies of Debt and Displacement

A Town Like Alice is perhaps best remembered for its shocking account, based on a true story, of a group of women and children forced by their Japanese captors to march the length and breadth of

Malaya, as no POW camp would accept them. In Shute's novel, many of the group die. As they walk, they encounter extremes of kindness and cruelty, most powerfully juxtaposed when an Australian POW is crucified for his attempt to help them. Eventually, they find refuge in a Malay village, working in the rice paddies until the war's end. This disturbing story in itself might be considered more than enough for a novel, but significantly, it occupies only half the book. The rest is concerned with postwar reconstruction, romance and the building of the titular 'town like Alice'. The novel's protagonist is Jean Paget, a Malay-speaking British typist who gradually emerges as the leader of the women; she does not, however, control the narration. Rather, the story is told through Shute's preferred device of a frame narrator, in this case, an elderly solicitor, Noel Strachan, who meets Jean after the war when she inherits a considerable sum of money from an uncle she barely remembers. Strachan is the trustee of this inheritance and is obliged to interest himself in her choices due to her uncle's belief that no woman under the age of thirty-five is fit to manage her own affairs. The misogynistic nature of the bequest is crucial to the story, as it acts to contain the agency of an otherwise remarkable female veteran. Jean, like her male counterparts, understands the necessity of work to postwar survival, and her experiences in Malaya have given her the veteran's characteristic toughness.[32] Like so many fictional (and actual) men of this generation, she feels old beyond her years and out of place in a changed world (29, 154). The inheritance, however, unexpectedly gives her economic agency and the opportunity to repay her debt to the village that gave refuge to the walking women: she heads out to Malaya to build a well.

This gesture, while endorsing the virtues of British imperialism and redolent of white saviour mentality, is also an act of feminist solidarity that demonstrates the limits of female agency in patriarchal societies seeking to reconstruct gender norms in the aftermath of war. In order to gift a well as a 'thank offering' to the women of the village, Jean must 'manage' its men; she must negotiate, through a form of soft-power diplomacy, the gender rules

of a rural Muslim village by persuading the village elders that her actions will not cause irreparable damage to 'tradition' (121–22). She has to do exactly the same thing in extracting funds from Strachan as the paternalistic guardian of her inheritance, and in setting up her businesses in the Australian outback, a culture where 'respectable' women are still banned from hotel bars. In each of the book's settings, Jean's success – her skill – lies in her ability to be an active agent without emasculating the men around her. Nowhere will this be more important than in the novel's romance plot and the narrative of reconstruction that lies at its heart. While most thrillers and male melodramas foreground the perspective of the troubled hero, before rewarding him with the consolations of a 'good' woman, *A Town Like Alice* demonstrates what a good woman can bring to the table of postwar reconstruction. Jean shares the veteran's sense of dislocation, she understands the responsibility of leadership, she can speak the language of men – and because of these qualities, she is ideally placed to bridge the transition between wartime homosociality and postwar heteronormativity.[33] But she can only do this because the ultimate goal of her ambition is domestic. This is a woman who does not just rebuild a man, she rebuilds an entire community in order to create an ideal postwar home.

The romance plot develops when Jean belatedly discovers that Joe Harman, the Australian crucified for stealing chickens, survived his ordeal. This is a revelation to her, 'like the opening of a door' (126), exposing the extent of the guilt she had felt over the soldier's punishment. Strachan, noting the radical change in her demeanour, observes that 'till that time she had never really recovered from the war' (154). It is not surprising that Joe's crucifixion – or indeed, his resurrection – should carry such weight in the text: at the time, his sacrifice is read by the more religious women in the group as an unlikely second coming. Desperate for something to believe in, 'accurate memory of the Australian began to fade, and was replaced by an awed and roseate memory of the man he had not been' (98). Jean, with the insight of sexual attraction, is exempt from belief in Joe's divinity; but she is not immune from the sense that an

irreparable debt has been incurred. This debt will shape her response, and the regulatory framework of man-making it encodes, when the two characters are eventually reunited.

Having discovered that Joe is alive, Jean travels to Australia to look for him, fearing that he might not have recovered sufficiently to undertake the essential man-making process of work (132); Joe, meanwhile, having just discovered by equally fortunate chance that Jean was not married, turns up in London looking for her. Strachan's role as gatekeeper thus becomes romantic as well as financial, as he takes on the conventional paternal role of vetting a potential husband (150).[34] While Joe is appropriately stoic, he has been permanently marked by his experience. His hands bear the stigmata of the crucifixion, and he walks with a 'curious stiff gait' (135). When finally reunited with Jean, this phrase reappears, and the burden of suffering is symbolically transferred to the woman debtor: a 'little shaft of pain struck her; that was Kuantan, and it had left its mark on him' (206). But while the scars Joe bears will reappear intermittently – occasional hauntings appropriate to a culture busy forgetting the war (208, 216) – Jean's legacy ensures that physical damage is displaced in favour of the more manageable and, crucially, reparable form of economic disability. The real barrier to the future happiness of Joe and Jean is not his damaged body, it is her financial power. This becomes clear when they take their first weekend together on a secluded island, and Jean is surprised to find the expected sexual advance is not forthcoming. Having anticipated 'repelling boarders' and arriving 'at some emotional conclusion', Jean correctly deduces that Joe is inhibited by her new status as a wealthy Englishwoman (219, 220). Her solution is to reanimate her wartime self; dressing in the sarong she wore when they first met, she reinhabits her past vulnerability, and in the process enables Joe's re-masculinisation. With an appropriate gender dynamic restored, Joe's response is immediate and violently sexual. For a second time, Jean becomes the symbolic recipient of pain, this time being marked by the bruises of Joe's ardour (223–24). This is the one section of the novel in which Joe's wounds come into focus. The

sight of his back, 'puckered and distorted with enormous scars', brings tears to Jean's eyes (216), and her repeated fondling of the 'great scars' on his hands acts as a reiteration of the debt she owes him – a debt perversely balanced by the repeated reference to her bruises (222, 225, 230). Exposing Joe's wounds at the very point of his masculine self-reassertion is fundamental to the novel's work of reconstruction: wartime damage need not emasculate and Joe's brief formulation as an object of desire offers both intra- and extra-diegetic reassurance.

Equally important to the business of postwar reconfiguration is the morning after the virtuously not-quite-consummated night before: the couple spend the day 'in a curious mixture of love-making and economic discussion' (227). *A Town Like Alice* ultimately embeds male reconstruction within a model of capitalist social engineering. Jean, despairing of Willstown, the nearest settlement to Joe's outback cattle station, determines to turn it into a 'town as good as Alice Springs' (297). She sets about dedicating her money to this process, but it is not just her funds which enable the transformation, it is the familiar postwar ideology of work. Jean begins by making things – 'engineering' shoes and starting a workshop – a process that is both a form of prosthetic agency for her veteran self and the foundations of the domestic self that she must ultimately inhabit. The workshop is accompanied by an ice-cream parlour, which in due course begets a shop, a cinema, a beauty parlour and a swimming pool. The rehabilitation of the town brings women, women bring more men and Jean effectively becomes the agent of the whole community's re-masculinisation. A dying town becomes a thriving fecund space, potent with the generation of new life (306–7). By the novel's end, Jean has become an avatar of capitalist enterprise, proving the old adage 'build it and they will come' (297, 306).[35] But she has also become a wife and a mother, and her diplomatic support has seen Joe develop the cattle station and become its owner. Her economic agency has enabled his; order, once again, has been restored. In the final pages, Strachan visits and Jean takes him to see her original workshop: 'There was a

long mirror at the end of the shop, and a few pictures of hair styles and frocks cut out of illustrated magazines pinned up on the wall. "We change those every so often," she said. "I like them to make the best of themselves"' (310). Domestic femininity, and its correlate, domestic citizenship, is the end point of Jean's endeavour, not just for herself but for the broader community. In an example of what the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere dubbed 'femininity as masquerade', she disguises her considerable and inappropriate 'masculine' agency behind a conspicuous display of feminine conformity.[36] Training the women of the Australian outback in appropriate modes of womanliness is the masquerade disguising Jean's not just masculine but fundamentally patriarchal role as the economic progenitor of the community and the arbiter of coercive feminine norms.

A Town Like Alice, then, sets about managing the transition from war to peace through physical, mental and economic regeneration. The wounds of war are discreetly represented, and displaced, in order to be rendered manageable and – through sexual and economic agency – overcome. The building of the town and the representation of Joe as a calm, capable station manager are crucial to the reassurance of the text, which in its two-part, frame-narrated structure balances wartime trauma with postwar rehabilitation. With the love of a good woman, the book assures us, even crucified men can make a go of the postwar world. When adapted for the cinema, however, Joe's wounds prove harder to represent, and the symbolic negotiation of male damage becomes instead a signifying absence. In its film manifestation, *A Town Like Alice* refuses to consider the vulnerability of the Western male body that is so central to the book, displacing it instead onto the suffering bodies of women, children and the enemy.

Six years distance the film version of *Alice* from the novel, and the differences in plot and representation are significant. Both texts take on the task of representing the war in the East, a conflict in which prisoners of war were treated with unparalleled brutality and callousness.[37] Whereas Shute's postwar novel handled this brutality

with crisp efficiency – a prosaic sensibility attuned to the needs of wartime and its immediate aftermath – the film is elegiac, an act of grief work mediated through the camera's gaze. The primary focus of this gaze is the astonishing beauty and stillness of Virginia McKenna, who, as Jean Paget, is posed in a series of grief tableaux, the deaths of those around her registered in a stoic mask of suffering that is only occasionally disrupted by tears. In a thoughtful discussion of McKenna's screen persona, and her ability to convey an unusually complex 'mature' femininity, Christine Geraghty observes that in war films such as *Alice*, 'she adopts the qualities associated with male stars of the period: resolution, toughness and a stiff upper lip'.[38] The cultural masculinity of Shute's pragmatic man-and-community building Jean Paget finds a visual analogue in McKenna's archetypal performance of wartime endurance. Her stoicism brings gravitas to the suffering of the group, as does the dignified memorialisation of the dead. The camera lingers on the faces of the dying women and children and even, ultimately, on the face of their long-serving Japanese guard rendered vulnerable by age and shame. Each adult is given a moment of speech or recognition before they are frozen in death. When the film reaches 'peak' sacrifice – as the women cross swamp territory and succumb in numbers to fever and exhaustion – the memorial process is supplemented by a poignant pan across the grave markers, as the much-reduced band of survivors slowly make their way out of shot.

Illustration 5.2 Cultural masculinity, *A Town Like Alice*

Illustration 5.3 Women, children, others, *A Town Like Alice*

Yet, while the bodies of dying women and children come centre stage, Joe's crucifixion proves beyond representation. The scene is set by two Japanese soldiers measuring the space of a man on the tree to which Joe will be nailed; the camera pauses on the hammer and nails that await him. We see the audience of women and POWs brought to the stage. But once Joe is dragged, bound and already beaten, to the tree, the camera turns away, and the event is almost entirely framed through reaction shots. Only at the very end of the sequence, after Captain Sugaya has decreed his release, is Joe (Peter Finch) revealed. His face alone fills the screen: still, silent, beaded with sweat. The film categorically refuses the spectacle of the broken male body; it equally refuses to dwell on the process of reconstruction. Indeed, the entire second half of the novel is radically truncated, condensed into a mere six minutes of screen time. Willstown is not turned into a town like Alice; Joe and Jean experience no difficulties on being reunited (although McKenna is permitted to signify a touch of anxiety by fumbling with her lipstick as she awaits Joe's arrival). Joe, meanwhile, appears untouched by his experience. We first see his postwar incarnation in the solicitor's office. Sharply dressed in a well-cut dark suit, with his hands in his pockets, Finch looks handsome and relaxed. The dialogue is minimal in the extreme: 'You alright now?' asks Strachan; 'sure, I'm fine,' replies Joe. And this would seem to be the case. When Joe and Jean embrace at the airport, the camera shoots the couple from both sides: a clear shot of Finch's hands reveal them to be without blemish. There is, quite literally, no trace of his torture and wounding.

Illustration 5.4 Without stain, *A Town Like Alice*

Ten years after the conflict's end, the war in the East finds some form of cinema representation,[39] and it is through an act of sacrificial displacement. The agony of the war, specifically, the humiliating damage inflicted on the white, Western male body, is symbolised by the suffering of women and children, while the complexity of postwar reconstruction – and any trace of women's unconventional agency – is overridden by the glib assertion of male rehabilitation and a heteronormative happy ending. Peter Finch's Joe is reborn through a miraculous resurrection and, undoubtedly, one achieved without female intervention.

The marginalisation of women's agency in the adaptation of *A Town Like Alice* is indicative of an evolving postwar zeitgeist: this cultural turn would have implications for Shute's later attempts to imagine veteran subjectivities. As the 1950s progressed, in cinema and fiction, women featured less as helpmeets and more as problems inhibiting male agency, while the home – originally imagined as a refuge and site of heteronormative restoration –

mutated into a space of entrapment and enclosure. This dynamic was far-reaching, and not confined to stories of women's betrayal: it is equally evident in films depicting conventionally 'happy' marriages such as *Man in the Sky* (discussed in Chapter 2), where the pressure of supporting the home drives the pilot hero to put his life at risk to save his job. His wife, Mary, is not demonised; she is simply represented as the feminine other who cannot comprehend the psychic demands of masculinity. Mary is typical of what Christine Geraghty terms a 'regressive mode' in British film culture. Exploring the disjuncture between socio-political changes in women's lives and screen representations of femininity, Geraghty observes that the cinema 'seemed to be locked into systems of gender that were out of line with the contemporary views about mature femininity that found a ready outlet in other forms of popular culture such as women's magazines and fiction'.[40] The regressive mode reconfigures age-old cultural assumptions for the postwar era: women are 'creatures' of instinct, mobilised by desire rather than rationality; they exist outside the ethics of citizenship and are incapable of understanding public duty.

The return to a 'separate spheres' ideology, in fiction if not in actuality, had a significant impact on postwar plotting. As the war receded, so too did representations of women's agency, and their confinement within the domestic symbolised the cultural perception that building men is dependent upon the disempowerment of women. Women who transgressed the public/private division were demonised, seen not just as out of place but actively uncivil. This representational transition parallels the anxieties about residual male violence that circulated throughout the period. What would six years of war have done to women's 'essential' femininity? Having insisted, throughout the conflict, that women had a vital – if temporary – place in the prosecution of war, cultural discourse rapidly moved to ensure that female veterans were left in no doubt as to their place and plot trajectory: the home and maternity.[41] The fear that women might struggle to rediscover their essential femininity, that they might have been contaminated by war, took concrete form in films

that raised the spectre of female monstrosity. In *The Gentle Gunman* (1952), a film about an Irish Republican Army (IRA) soldier who changes his mind about the value of violent struggle, the blood-thirsty female, Maureen (Elizabeth Sellars), proves far more deadly than most of the men involved. Maureen's commitment to the Republican cause is configured as extreme – a visceral, erotic bloodlust – and her faith in an outworn creed of violence threatens not only peace and stability but also the homosocial bond between men. When her first love Terry (John Mills) becomes the 'gentle' gunman of the title, Maureen rapidly switches allegiance to his brother Matt (Dirk Bogarde). Terry is now a 'traitor' who deserves to die, while Matt's imminent death for the cause renders him newly attractive. In configuring Maureen as the repository of violence and the antithesis of life-giving maternal femininity, the film effectively cleanses its two male box-office stars of complicity. This deflection of responsibility from the male soldier even extends to the IRA leader: while Shinto (Robert Beatty) is represented as reckless, violent and uncompromising, the film does not show his capture. Rather, he and the film's comedy drunken bomb makers exit in a car chase, leaving the film to conclude with an assertion of Maureen's redundancy. A striking three shot, composed of Matt in the background, Terry in the foreground and Maureen in the middle, cuts to the brothers departing together. Maureen is left framed alone against the desolate sky, while the men walk away from her and from violence, a rejection of the warlike woman and, indeed, a statement that women have no place in war.

This sentiment, and the representational transitions that accompany it, overwrites the companionate ideal and shared suffering depicted in Shute's original version of *A Town Like Alice*, and goes some way towards explaining the cinematic erasure of Jean Paget's exceptional agency. Jean Paget on screen may exhibit masculine strength of character but she looks unlikely to change the landscape of postwar Australia. These changes also explain the very different gender prescriptions at the heart of a later Nevil Shute novel, which radically reworks the romantic quests and debt

economy central to *A Town Like Alice*. In *Requiem for a Wren* (1955), a damaged wartime 'couple' do not miraculously find each other; and, although both suffer devastating wounds, their fates prove disturbingly divergent. The man is granted narrative control and eventual rehabilitation, while the woman is subject to an almost sadistic level of punishment for the crime of annexing male agency.

Requiem for a Wren tells the story of two veterans: Alan Duncan, a wartime flyer, and leading Wren Janet Prentice. The two meet only once, on a beautiful spring day in the prelapsarian calm before the storm of D-Day, when Janet is introduced as the unofficial fiancée of Alan's brother Bill. Bill and Janet die as a result of the war; Alan – whose war ends when he is shot down and loses both feet – survives to become the frame narrator and protagonist of a very peculiar rehabilitation quest. The incident that wounds him is central to the story but only obliquely approached; it is not recounted until the mid-point of the novel, and then with little detail. Similarly, Alan's recovery – embracing variously self-pity, an Oxford law degree, qualification for the Bar and a brief experiment with motor racing – appears as marginalia in the story of his fruitless postwar quest for Janet. The book thus begins eight years after D-Day with Alan returning, as the prodigal son, to his wealthy Australian home; a processional disrupted by the news that his parents' parlour maid has committed suicide. The discovery that this was Janet, the very woman for whom he had been searching, prompts the reconstruction of the missing years. It is a bleak story. Janet Prentice, an Ordnance Wren, is accustomed to weaponry and skilled at shooting. When a Junkers aircraft appears out of the blue – seemingly spying on D-Day preparations – she is authorised by a male officer to shoot at it. Although not the only gunner to fire at the aircraft, she is thought likely to have brought it down, and is reprimanded for her actions.[42] On learning that the aircraft might have been attempting to surrender, she becomes distressed, albeit in an appropriately stoical and silent fashion (101–2). Unable to discuss the incident with her trusted male familiars, a sense of guilt begins to grow, along with the perception that she has incurred a debt of

seven lives and must be punished appropriately (202, 213).[43] In short order, her world falls apart. Bill, a marine frogman, is killed on a mission; her father is killed in a freak accident; Bill's dog, which she promised to look after, is run over by a tank. This sequence of events prompts a breakdown, and the end of her career in the Wrens. Having gone straight from school to the Navy, she becomes a veteran unprepared for civilian life, and spends the rest of the book trying to get back into the service, in search of the 'full, useful life she had once known' (240). Postwar, the punishments continue: her mother dies; she moves to Seattle to live with an aunt. Her aunt, as well as her aunt's dog, dies. Still searching for purpose and encouraged by an American doctor to whom she finally confesses her 'expiation' thesis (214), she travels to Australia to see whether Bill's parents, who had not been told of their affair, might need her help.[44] She discovers instead that they are wealthy beyond her imagination – the landed gentry of sheep farming – and cannot thus reveal her story for fear of being seen as a gold digger. She takes a job as a parlour maid under an assumed name, losing herself in a displaced relationship to the life she might have had. Her suicide – the symbolic seventh death – is prompted by the return of Alan, the one person who knows her identity.

The narrative's central irony – that Alan and Janet unwittingly use each other as a means of negotiating wartime loss – turns the book into a perverse love story. Alan imagines Janet as a symbol of idealised womanhood and the homosocial residue of his lost brother (180), just as she has cherished a vision of him as the ideal self-effacing warrior male and a means of restoring the lost future she had imagined with Bill (222, 242–43).[45] Each, then, had tentatively imagined an impossible love for an idealised version of the other, an ideal built around wartime homosociality rather than heteronormativity. A significant dimension of Janet's appeal to both brothers is her lack of conventional femininity. As a capable, hard-working Wren, she is part of a wartime 'community of experience' (68), who understands the rules of masculine performance. Alan

approves her ‘forthrightness’, ‘directness of speech’ and the fact that Bill ‘didn’t have to put on an act for her’ (68). She is good with machines, can talk shop (58) and looks after the war-weary Bill without being seen to do so (68–69, 88).[46] Imagining himself in loco parentis, Alan concludes that while she might ‘never dress very well’, she will make a good wife for his brother and a good mistress of the estate (89). In his postwar pursuit of the lost Janet, then, Alan seeks a reinstatement of the past rather than a culturally approved heterofuturity: his quest displaces the need for family planning and the confrontation of his disability, a point emphasised by his mother’s oft voiced preoccupation with his failure to acquire a wife (230).

A significant problem for both Janet and Alan is their fetishisation of the past. Their deadly nostalgia is diagnosed by Viola, another wartime Wren who has successfully built a future for herself in the film industry.[47] The world, she concludes, will always be in danger of another war because her generation had ‘too good a time in the last one’ (185). For a whole generation, she argues, youth was equated with war, and nostalgia for the one inevitably becomes nostalgia for the other. Safety, for individual and society, lies in ‘accumulating other interests – homes, and children, and work we wouldn’t want to leave’ (185). Janet’s distance from this rehabilitative ideal is all too evident in her optimistic investment in the Korean war (209, 211, 240). That Alan is equally unable to diagnose or treat his postwar malaise, however, is discreetly managed as a safely retrospective subtext. Janet’s spectacular descent becomes a screen for male vulnerability, a means of keeping Alan’s difficulties at a respectful distance. This process is facilitated by the novel’s complex frame construction. As the earlier discussion of *The Rose and the Yew Tree* indicated, frame narrators are paradoxically both marginal and central; in controlling the story of another, they deflect attention from themselves. It is a technique beloved of Shute and used repeatedly in his fiction. In *No Highway*, Honey’s dangerous proximity to the feminine is defused and made

safe by Scott's affectless narration; in *A Town Like Alice*, the vulnerability of Strachan – lonely, ageing and in love with a woman half his age – is displaced in the telling of Jean's story. When his desire is glimpsed, its containment serves to connote an admirable stoicism. In *Requiem for a Wren*, the method reaches new heights, as Alan's narrative appropriation of Janet – the pursuit of her story; the evidence of her pain; the edited presentation of her diary, described as an 'emotional outlet' (195) – ensures that *his* disabled body is only glimpsed. He does not become spectacular, nor an object of fascination or pity; rather, the reader is forced to focus on the safer story of a woman's psychic collapse.

The normative male invisibility of Alan's authoritative, paternalistic first-person narration semi-effaces his body from the text, and the process of disguising male damage is further facilitated by the novel's interwoven temporalities. The book has a tripartite time frame, beginning in a mid-1950s contemporaneity, before flashing back to 1944, after which it oscillates between events on Janet's timeline and that of the pursuing Alan. Eventually, all three temporalities converge in the Australian present. Significantly, this keeps Alan's recovery from wounding contained in the past: the initial humiliations of disability are briefly exposed, only to be neatly brought under control by his father's veteran psychology and the catharsis of a long sea voyage steeped in alcohol (150).[48] Cocooned by the safety net of wealth, Alan's adaptation becomes another achievement modestly not mentioned, like his Rhodes scholarship and eventual degree. Yet, the authority of frame narration can only achieve so much. For all its discretion, *Requiem for a Wren* remains the story of a man who cannot face coming home and who spends five years searching for a woman he hardly knows. Like Janet's death debt that must be expiated, Alan has not resolved the trauma of his wounding, nor can he reconcile himself to the demands of domestic citizenship. He cannot accept Australian women untouched by a war from which they were far distant, seeking instead the comfort of an Englishwoman who speaks his veteran language (153). When he finds such a woman in Viola, the lost object-ideal of

Janet comes between them. This obsession threatens to undermine the authority of his narrative, as does his abject self-description. Little time is spent on his disability, but when it does appear, its representation is in marked contrast to the formulations favoured by disabled autobiographers. Alan repeatedly calls himself a cripple (149, 154, 172, 188), and emphasises what he cannot do (148). He returns to flying 'more for mental discipline and to show myself I wasn't afraid' than out of pleasure and establishes himself as a father figure on the racing circuit, passing his car on to a convenient cadet and racing by proxy rather than in person (164–65). Perhaps most symbolic of his psychic rather than physical wounding are the two sticks he uses to walk, a vision of old age that exceeds even the three-legged prescription of the Sphinx's riddle (172).

The self-protection of imagined old age is deployed with relish by Richard Hillary as he sits in a nightclub, drunkenly telling his similarly wounded accomplice that they are 'free of the lusts of youth', and William Simpson writes of a largely temporary generational rift opened up by his extreme experiences.[49] But in *Requiem for a Wren*, Alan's premature paternalism speaks to a failure of adjustment and a post-traumatic postponement of domestic citizenship. This has implications for the plot. That Alan and Janet should be damaged by war, suffer loneliness and dislocation, and struggle to reconcile themselves to the future in a world seemingly indifferent to their experience makes good sense: it is an exemplary demobilisation narrative. Where *Requiem* departs from this script and becomes a more disturbing and misogynist text is in its conclusion. Here, in keeping with the evolving cultural mores of the later 1950s, the wartime woman becomes a narrative problem to be tidied up by male authority: a figure from whose death male agency can be reborn. Having spent the book looking for Janet, Alan is perversely liberated by the discovery of her suicide. Indeed, he imagines her 'in her proper place' as a ghost alongside his brother (249). He now has the full story, he is in possession of the facts and with this, his feminine obsession is cured: 'the power of reasoning put out emotion from my mind' (249). In this moment, his postwar

rehabilitation is finally enabled. He rushes to the phone to call Viola, the woman who had selflessly assisted with his search for Janet, and whose love he is now free to reciprocate – and which the book has not had to describe or imagine due to its insistent focus on the hallucinatory, and safely de-eroticised, body of the wartime woman.

In *Requiem for a Wren*, the companionate pattern of *A Town Like Alice*, with Joe and Jean's gratifyingly rewarded mutual searching and carefully gender-calibrated postwar reconstruction, is rewritten as a parable of separate spheres. The vulnerability of the damaged male, and his postwar malaise, is displaced onto the sacrificial body of a woman, and overcome through her eventual death: Janet has served admirably as the prosthesis enabling Alan's eventual heteronormative agency.[50] In Shute's fiction, then, the damaged male body is marginalised, contained and discreetly reconstructed. Hammond Innes, by contrast, puts the vulnerable body front and centre, telling an altogether messier story of traumatic wounding and its impact on the corporeal and psychic integrity of the male subject.

Fluid Dynamics: Mind and Body in Hammond Innes

> 'Everything is much simpler when you're drunk. Perhaps it is because the urge to live is less.'[51]
>
> The anonymity of normalcy is no story at all.[52]

Discussing the emergence of a concept of 'the norm' that would become a structuring feature of the bourgeois novel, Lennard Davis observes that 'if disability appears in a novel, it is rarely centrally represented. … On the other hand, as sufficient research has shown, more often than not villains tend to be physically abnormal:

scarred, deformed, or mutilated'.[53] Similarly, Ato Quayson observes the pervasive equivalence between impairment and 'moral deficit/evil'.[54] It is not difficult to find examples to support these statements – Fleming's Bond novels are replete with the disfigured, disabled and pathologically augmented – but it is worth considering their stability in relation to the postwar thriller. As Chapter 1 indicated, the thriller hero is habitually, and structurally, an outsider: his recuperation within societal norms at the novel's end is often compromised or ambivalent at best. These are not books that comfortably replicate ideologies of belonging and social conformity, even if they do often end in the assertion of heteronormativity; and it is thus valuable to explore the extent to which the thriller might disrupt conventions of disabled representation and enable a more complex negotiation of 'the norm'. This is not to suggest that the thriller has a particularly radical approach to the disabled body; rather, it is to acknowledge that in the postwar period, disabled heroes become remarkably normative figures. In some sense, this echoes the strategic wartime necessity of accepting differently abled bodies as 'fit' for combat, but it also speaks profoundly to the process of reconstructive man-making.

The earlier summary of Hammond Innes's literary career gave some indication of his fondness for extreme environments. His novels occupy icecaps, cross oceans and evade avalanches, co-opting nature as a proving space designed to reveal the truth of men and, to a lesser extent, women. In the immediate postwar years, his preferred settings are cold and wet, designed to emphasise endurance and bring out the best of British phlegm, while ensuring that the incipient hysteria of his often overwrought heroes is unlikely to become too fevered. It equally ensures that any element of romance in the emergent relationship with the 'daughter-cadet' figure is unlikely to disturb the horses. For sound practical reasons, most characters keep their clothes on in Hammond Innes novels. *The Angry Mountain* (1950), however, breaks this customary mould, not least by concluding with a spectacular volcanic eruption. While, at first sight, fire might seem a straightforward substitute for ice, the

book itself suggests otherwise. The heat of Vesuvius seems to inflame Innes's psychic landscape, generating a novel capable of equating seductive women and simmering volcanoes (105).[55] The critics were divided. Everyone liked Vesuvius – 'the real hero of this thundering good story' – and applauded Innes's handling of a terrifying denouement in which the dust-encrusted characters are trapped by a pincer movement of advancing lava flows.[56] But few could accept the novel's unusually intense preoccupation with postwar disorientation and the psychology of survival. In a damning account, *The Saturday Review* captured the novel's psychedelic tone, calling it 'a protracted nightmare, a wild anxiety dream peopled with ambiguous characters, vague as if seen through a mist, who fade in and dissolve out as in a surrealistic film'.[57] The *Times Literary Supplement* was more blunt:

> Mr Hammond Innes prefers action to character. He belongs to the school of John Buchan, debased by the influence of the 'tough' American writers. *The Angry Mountain* is just another Secret Service thriller about helping Czechs to escape from behind the Iron Curtain to Italy, but Mr Innes's efforts to enliven this familiar idea with liberal doses of violence and psychoanalysis make it unsuitable for schoolboys and wearisome for their elders.[58]

These are revealing comments, exposing much about the cultural anxieties of the postwar. The desire to place Innes in the tradition of Buchan and the fear that he has been 'debased' by American influence are typical of concerns shared across the political spectrum by writers from J. B. Priestly to George Orwell to Evelyn Waugh.[59] But the anxieties of the *Times Literary Supplement* also speak to postwar society's insistence upon emotional continence and verbal restraint. The cultural imperative to 'move on' from the war, and the long-held middle-class valorisation of privacy – still potent five years later in Shute's *Requiem* – demanded that wartime damage be

negotiated behind closed doors. *The Angry Mountain* confronts and destabilises this expectation. As the central symbol of an exploding mountain suggests, this is a book about the return of the repressed, and before the customary resolutions of heteronormativity and British self-possession can be achieved, Dick Farrell, the war-damaged hero, must undergo a devastating psycho-dramatic re-enactment of past trauma. Farrell is a mess. His alcoholic blackouts, copious sweating, emotional instability, crippling indecision and fear amounting almost to physical paralysis are in excess even of the familiar beleaguered thriller hero; but in presenting such a figure, *The Angry Mountain* offers a remarkable picture of the 'other' of postwar masculine conformity. From its sado-masochistic exposure of the wounded male body to its very angry mountain, the book makes damage visible, offering a hyperbolic representation of just what has to be overcome before the tranquillity of domestic citizenship can be achieved.

The Angry Mountain begins in Cold War Czechoslovakia, but its central drama concerns the war experience of Farrell, its narrator and protagonist. An experienced RAF pilot flying agents into Italy, he was shot down, imprisoned and had his leg amputated without anaesthetic in an attempt to make him talk. The lack of a leg is, however, the least of his worries. His real problem is the psychological damage inflicted by torture: the guilt not only of having survived but of having, eventually, *talked*. The absolute unacceptability of this transgression in terms of both masculinity and national identity is evident in Farrell's self-loathing, but the potency of the prohibition – even under extreme duress – is equally illustrated by Nigel Balchin's *Mine Own Executioner* (1945). A brief comparison is instructive. Balchin has no need of volcanoes: his unashamedly psychological novel concerns an analyst's attempt to help a decorated RAF pilot who, since returning home, has made a couple of attempts to kill his wife. The pilot, Adam Lucian, appears unquestionably heroic, having been shot down in Burma and tortured by the Japanese before escaping through the jungle on a broken leg. Yet, he perceives himself a failure and has to be drugged

before he can talk about his war experience. What emerges is telling: 'Lucian's voice rose suddenly to a shriek. "The whole bloody lot. I told them everything I knew and what I didn't know I made up. Everything. Everything that little runt asked. I poured it out."'[60] In these images of incontinent, uncontrolled expression, Lucian reveals the power of the masculine myth – the cultural prescription of appropriate masculinity that insists a man be firmly bounded, strong and preferably silent.[61] That Lucian was tortured, starved, wounded and exhausted is not enough to excuse the fundamental breach of having talked.[62] Balchin's novel is pessimistic about the veteran's prospects: Lucian goes on to kill his wife and commit suicide. Innes, writing a thriller, is more generous, allowing his protagonist the redemption of restored self-control. However, this comes at a cost and is not achieved until after his masculine boundaries have suffered a series of radical and humiliating breaches.

Farrell, like Lucian, has attempted to put the war behind him and make the transition to a viable form of postwar subjectivity, taking a job as a travelling machine tool salesman. Nonetheless, his unresolved trauma is evident from his drinking, his fragmentary sense of self (10, 29) and the fact that his job keeps him 'wandering around Europe like a nomad' (9). In *The Angry Mountain*, as in many postwar fictions, Europe functions as a space of melodrama (46) and a site where the war can be continued or re-enacted, while Britain remains pure – an unsullied domestic ideal.[63] Farrell's nemesis and the book's most deadly antagonist is Dr Giovanni Sansevino, the Italian doctor who tortured him for the Gestapo, amputating his left leg in incremental sections until he gave up the details of the agents he had dropped into Italy. That he gave way when threatened with the anaesthetic-free amputation of his other leg will be, to most readers, entirely understandable. However, the book also has its obligatory bully, who operates as an externalisation of Farrell's guilt. Alec Reece, betrayed and captured, is so incensed by this apparent act of cowardice that he breaks up the relationship

between Farrell and his sister. As the story opens, then, the 'hero' is a lonely, disabled travelling salesman with a barely controlled drink problem and nightmares that can only be held at bay by the conventional panacea of work. This work takes him behind the Iron Curtain, to a Czech factory owned by Jan Tuček, a fellow wartime pilot. Unbeknown to Farrell, Tuček is about to defect to the West to join his international table tennis–playing daughter Hilda, the book's daughter-cadet, who will drive the search for her father when he disappears en route to Italy. Equally unbeknown to Farrell – who had hit the bottle at the first sight of a wartime memory – is the fact that Tuček has hidden microfilm and diamonds in the shaft of his artificial leg. Farrell thus becomes central to a plot he does not understand, and which is complicated by disturbing wartime reanimations – first in the form of his former colleague, the intelligence agent Maxwell, then in the shape of Reece and his sister and, finally, most traumatically, in the uncanny manifestation of Sansevino, who has escaped justice by stealing the identity of an American airman, Walter Shirer. Farrell's heightened proprioception – a perverse psychosomatic connection with Sansevino – sees through this disguise, but his state of self-doubt is so profound, and his perceived wartime failure so great, that no one will believe him, and he scarcely believes himself (54, 59).

What follows is, as *The Saturday Review* diagnosed, a protracted surreal nightmare. The action moves to Italy, where Farrell is semi-seduced by a drug-addicted Contessa and haunted by the memories of his traumatic amputation, manifest as a sado-masochistic, almost erotic, physical sensation in which the doctor's hands sensually stroke his absent leg. Asleep and awake, across the novel, this haptic hypersensitivity torments him:

> It is extraordinary how nerves can recall touch in such detail. The slow, stroking movement of the tops of his long, sensitive fingers was indelibly fixed on the nerve record of my brain. … He hadn't wanted me to talk. He'd wanted me to remain silent, so that he could operate. I could tell that by the way his breath

> came in his gathering excitement … Soon it had been only the remains of the leg that he had stroked so gently, so caressingly.
>
> (29)

With each of these psychic reconnections, the boundaries of Farrell's masculinity collapse further into a femininity of fluids. 'The mere thought of him brought the sweat prickling out on my forehead' (28) he observes, and as he feels himself losing control in the shifting sands of the plot, his body betrays him in a profusion of perspiration and compensatory drinking (32, 40, 51). Unsurprisingly, his first intuition that the doctor is not dead generates a 'cold sweat of panic' and the perception of a hand seeming 'to touch my leg, caressing it – the leg that wasn't there' (52), an image which encapsulates the novel's discombobulating conflation of past and present, psychic and somatic, real and imagined. A crisis of disempowerment is reached when an emotional Farrell collapses semi-drunk into bed after trying to make sense of the temporal shifts he has experienced, only to awake from a conventional nightmare to find Sansevino's hands actually undoing his trousers and fondling his stump (69). This lurid scene both re-enacts the trauma of the surgery – Sansevino is attempting to amputate his prosthesis – and effects a psychic violation. Emerging from the nightmare of rape, Farrell, as usual, is destined not to be believed. His loss of agency is absolute, and he has to be rescued from a feminine state of hysterical prostration by the 'solid and practical' American tourist Hacket (70), who has wandered into the plot while touring the geological marvels of Europe. Hacket, the epitome of firmly bounded masculine functionality, is a device to move the story forward, but he is also a successfully domesticated veteran willing, in an appropriately homosocial fashion, to extend the bonds of community to the ostracised Farrell.[64]

As with Innes's other fiction from this period, male friendship is important but needs to be cleansed of the deadly compulsions and criminal pleasures of wartime.[65] This is the necessary transition from

a wartime subjectivity to domestic citizenship, and it depends upon the familiar assertion that the love of a good woman can restore damaged masculinity. When it becomes clear to Farrell that Hilda Tuček believes him and believes *in* him (164), he regains agency, behaves authoritatively, punches Sansevino in the face and flies the stranded characters to safety.[66] In this miraculous transition, the deadly, homoerotic constitutive other of Sansevino is replaced by the healthy heteronormative mirror of Hilda. *The Angry Mountain* thus reassures that wartime damage can be overwritten, or even undone, by nurturing femininity, but the novel's redemptive strategies push beyond the promise of domesticity to tackle pervasive cultural fears of veteran violence. Alan Allport suggests that the 'nation was troubled by the prospect of a generation of soldiers returning home angry and resentful, their powers of self-control attenuated by wartime stress and the skills of violence fresh in their mind'.[67] On the surface, the thriller might not seem the most likely formula to contain and assuage such fears, but *The Angry Mountain* does just that, both through the individual redemption of the hero and through the displacement of his richly articulated revenge fantasies onto a prosthetic agent. 'You can't kill a human being in cold blood' says Farrell reluctantly, working hard to demonstrate the progress of his cultural recuperation (185). But, as I observed earlier, this is an unusually hot novel, and one that wants to have its cake and eat it too: a process that involves the carefully calibrated negotiation of civilised revenge.

By the end of the book, everyone wants to kill Sansevino – even Hacket, the American tourist (170) – but postwar conceptions of British justice, values and the rule of law make it impossible for anyone to do so. Innes resolves this dilemma with the aid of what might be the most bathetic deus ex machina in all of popular fiction: George the mule. George is first encountered at the point of the thriller hero's nadir: Farrell has been beaten by Sansevino, lost the diamonds and his prosthetic leg and been locked in an abandoned house in the path of the advancing lava. In the process of escaping this predicament, he pauses to rescue a tethered mule: this act of

charity will be amply repaid, as the mule becomes a lucky charm enabling the stranded characters to escape. Flyers' superstitions were legion, investing inanimate objects with the power of life and death,[68] and the mule becomes a living embodiment of 'George', the lost toy horse that had safeguarded Farrell's RAF career. Indeed, so important does the mule become to Farrell that he refuses to fly without this newly reanimated mascot. In exchange, George kindly resolves the hero's fundamental ethical dilemma: British men may not be able to kill in cold blood, but a mule can do it for them. In a fully Freudian manner, George becomes the agent of the community's murderous desires, landing a well-placed kick in Sansevino's head.[69]

The death of Sansevino saves everyone 'a lot of trouble' (189), resolving the messy political and psychic residue of war in a single cathartic blow. It is also the culmination of a surreal narrative of psycho-dramatic restoration which has been building through a series of violent group encounters. In a self-consciously staged confrontation, all the characters are reunited in a villa bathed in the 'lurid light' of Vesuvius (127). At this point, the truth of Sansevino's identity is revealed and violence erupts turning the room into a 'scene from grand Guignol' (131).[70] When the therapy group next convenes, taking refuge from the advancing lava, Sansevino is forced to re-enact the narrative of Farrell's traumatic amputation by saving the leg of the intelligence agent Maxwell. Finally, the group assemble in the aircraft that only Farrell can fly. As he steps 'back into the war' and assumes control, Reece apologises and acknowledges his courage (183). The script of Farrell's last failed flight is thus rewritten, his place within structures of uniformity is restored and, through homosocial approval, his mental wounds are healed.

But where is the disabled body in this heady combination of thriller conventions and group therapy? Farrell's absent leg does a lot of work in the text: as a plot device, a prop and a symbol. It facilitates the depiction of Nazi brutality, enables diamond

smuggling, enriches the genre's sado-masochism and, in terms of Mitchell and Snyder's cutting observation that the 'anonymity of normalcy is no story at all', it makes Farrell stand out from the crowd.[71] Yet, equally, as far as the novel is concerned, Farrell's physical disability is insignificant: within the conventions of genre, it does not *disable* him. The climax of the novel, when Farrell is beaten by Sansevino, culminates in a second symbolic wounding: the removal of his artificial leg (143–44). While this might be seen as grotesque (it was by *The New York Times*), it is not a case of reducing a disabled character to the sum of his disability.[72] Rather, it is an entirely generic event enabling the thriller to operate. If Farrell had not had an artificial leg, he would have had to have been wounded or disadvantaged in some other way – tied up, shot, more seriously beaten – in order to generate the necessary jeopardy and enable the 'defeated' hero's recovery and return. When an 'overcoming' narrative is the structural norm, the disabled body becomes less a problem or a spectacle, and more a set of corporeal tools: the cards the hero has been dealt in a game of skill and chance.[73] The non-conforming body is normalised within the comforts of genre and a postwar context in which everyone is damaged; Farrell, in fact, does not stand out from the crowd. Indeed, when he repeatedly 'thrusts' his artificial leg at people in lieu of explanation or articulation of his feelings, his interlocutors largely ignore it (6, 59, 70). Whether this is an indication of embarrassment – the inability to look identified by William Simpson – or a shifting of the parameters of the normative body is unclear,[74] but this lack of narrative interest might also be seen to stand for what the text finds harder to discuss: the hidden 'disabilities' of demobilisation. In this reading, the missing leg is *not* Farrell's problem; rather, it is a narrative prosthesis for a more serious disability in socio-cultural terms: his damaged mind. While psychological trauma might find bodily expression – as in Farrell's sweating, for example – such corporeal signs are unreliable and hard to read. This uncertainty heightens the perception of danger; as

Jonathan Dollimore argues in relation to cultural fears of homosexuality, it is the very invisibility of this threat that so seriously jeopardises the stability of heteronormativity. The 'other as proximate', he suggests, 'proves more disturbing than the other as absolute difference'.[75] In the case of wartime wounds, much the same can be said for the mind/body divide. Missing legs can be seen, acknowledged and culturally assimilated: damaged minds are another matter. These cannot easily be read or recognised – even by experts – and this unknowability represents a threat to the community, and the possibility of its infiltration by a misrecognised 'other'. *The Angry Mountain*'s cathartic ending attempts to resolve its own misrecognitions – the customary generic underestimation of the thriller hero and the script of wartime damage – through the reassembly of Farrell's fragmented self. The world turned upside down by Sansevino has been righted, and Farrell wakes in hospital to discover a new world order in which the presiding genius of Vesuvius looks 'remote and unreal' (189). Sansevino is dead, the femme fatale has been recuperated for conjugal conformity and the absent father – Jan Tuček – has been restored to authority. In an utterly conventional patriarchal performative, Farrell trades diamonds for daughter, uniting homosocial and heterosexual in an idealised vision of the postwar home.

The fear that men would return from war bearing the invisible wounds of damaged and potentially violent minds is at the core of *The Angry Mountain*'s recuperative work. In the final sequence, Farrell's psychic wholeness overrides his physical lack. His masculinity is restored, his place within the national imaginary reinstated, and he has a new prosthesis in the form of Hilda. It is a comprehensive restoration of order but one that readers are unlikely to remember. Rather, through its incontinent images of an exploding volcano and a murderous mule, *The Angry Mountain* imprints itself on the memory through its melodramatic recognition of the impossible demands of emotional restraint and domestic citizenship.

Dick Farrell was a competent pilot, but it is unlikely that anyone would have called him a warrior. Like the majority of fictional – and

actual – soldiers, sailors and airmen encountered in this book so far, he conformed to the ideal of 'temperate' masculinity: reluctant but pragmatic, tough, professional, determined to do a good job but not in any way enthusiastic about the business.[76] In the next chapter, by contrast, I turn to 'intemperate' masculinity, in the form of the volatile, ruthless and bloody-minded figure of Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader, who – by all accounts – welcomed the war for the unparalleled prosthetic agency it gave him. Bader, a fighter pilot and double amputee, represents a very literal manifestation of prosthetic agency and the apotheosis of technological man-making. His story was rapidly mythologised, and his wartime career became a potent symbolic assertion of the nation's triumph over adversity. However, while Bader was an icon of successful rehabilitation, a resource to be maximised in a world of damage, he was nobody's idea of either temperate masculinity or domestic citizenship. In what follows, I explore how the postwar recounting of his life reconciled these contradictions to smooth the abrasive Bader and recuperate him for a newly domestic world.

[1] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, London: Verso, 1995, 132.

[2] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, 47. Elaborating on the concept, Mitchell and Snyder argue that 'disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight. Bodies show up in stories as dynamic entities that resist or refuse the cultural scripts assigned to them'. Such representations may be problematically limiting, but the disabled body nonetheless figures as 'a potent symbolic site of literary investment' (49).

[3] Ibid., 51.

[4] Ibid.

[5] H. E. Bates, *Fair Stood the Wind for France* (1944), London: Penguin, 2005, 231.

[6] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 8.

[7] Ibid., 15, 136–37.

[8] Ibid., 36.

[9] Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 14. Quayson offers a 'provisional' typology of representation which includes disability as the interface with otherness, as evil, as epiphany, as ritual insight, as hermeneutic impasse and as normality. These categories, he stresses, are not mutually exclusive and may intersect in unexpected ways (36, 52).

[10] Helen MacInnes, *Horizon* (1945), London: Fontana, 1969, 188.

[11] For discussion of the veteran as a 'foreign body' and 'irritant' in Balchin's novels, see Kate McLoughlin, *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790–2015*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 88–96.

[12] Both McRuer and Quayson explore the disabled body's capacity to generate epiphanic awareness. McRuer, discussing contemporary Hollywood's 'tolerance' of queer disabled bodies, suggests these epiphanies are specifically heteronormative, and disabled characters function as conduits enabling heterosexual repair (Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, New York: New York University Press, 2006, 15–16, 26–27; Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 42–45).

[13] Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 36.

[14] Thomson observes that from 'folktales and classical myths to modern and postmodern "grotesques", the disabled body is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice. Most disabled characters are enveloped by the otherness that their disability signals in the text' (*Extraordinary Bodies*, 10).

[15] Gabriel's class wound is written on his body. I'm grateful to Lucy Hall for drawing my attention to his 'common legs' (Agatha Christie, *The Rose and the Yew Tree* (1947), London: HarperCollins, 1997, 46, 157).

[16] Ibid., 50, 89.

[17] Ibid., 85, 72–73, 150–52.

[18] Christie's most famous detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, are culturally disadvantaged by factors of age, gender and national identity. Norreys is no detective, but his role echoes the

narrative agency of these atypical investigators: characters bring their stories, and he listens.

[19] John Lodwick, *Peal of Ordnance*, London: Methuen, 1947, 137.

[20] Ibid., 137, 138.

[21] Ibid., 140.

[22] The band, led by the albino Brother Doll, includes a hunchbacked man, a one-armed man and 'a flying figure, festooned with picturesque rags and moving with amazing speed and dexterity [swinging] himself between a pair of crutches' (Margery Allingham, *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957, 76).

[23] For example, the first of John Creasey's Scotland Yard series, *Gideon's Day* (1955), London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964, 70–71.

[24] We might also note the resilience – and ongoing agency – of Fleming's CIA agent, Felix Leiter. After losing an arm and a leg to a shark in *Live and Let Die* (1954), he reappears with two prosthetic limbs and scarcely impaired functionality in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1956); by *Thunderball* (1961), he appears to have grown a new leg (London: Vintage, 2012, 324).

[25] James C. Robertson's history of British cinema censorship reveals the limits of representation in the war and its aftermath. Constraints surrounded the representation of childbirth, religion, royalty, sex, violence and the reality of warfare; they also circumscribed the language that might be used to navigate such topics. However, Robertson notes a gradual liberalisation in the

mid-1940s, most clearly manifest in the passing of *Brighton Rock* (1947), which contained the 'sight of a razor slash across a man's cheek' – a new directness in the representation of wounding. Robertson also explores the British Board of Film Classification's (BBFC) resistance to the hospital whodunnit *Green for Danger* (1945), a film which kills several patients on the operating table. The anxious reaction to the film's plot reveals significant limits to the representation of medicalised bodies, and the 'sacred' space of the hospital (James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship in Action 1913–1972*, London: Routledge, 1993, 94, 92; 'British Film Censorship Goes to War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 2:1, 1982, 49–64).

[26] Johanna Laitila, *Melodrama, Self, and Nation in Post-War British Popular Film*, London: Routledge, 2018, 29–46.

[27] Laitila observes that in both *The October Man* and the costume melodrama *Caravan* (1946), psychological problems are the result of physical injury, thus 'externalising the cause for male vulnerability' (*Melodrama, Self, and Nation*, 39). For an extended analysis of *The October Man* and its demobilisation tropes, see Gill Plain, *John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 123–29.

[28] Resistance to the exposure of analysis is evident in articles such as *Picturegoer* magazine's 'Let Us Get Back to Normal' (11 October 1947), which pleads for release from films of 'schizophrenia, paranoia, neurasthenia and the rest'.

[29] The film has been extensively discussed. See Laitila, *Melodrama, Self and Nation*; Andrew Moor, *Powell and*

Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005.

[30] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 132.

[31] William Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944, 30.

[32] Nevil Shute, *A Town Like Alice* (1950), London: Pan, 1961, 18, 26. Subsequent page numbers are given in the text.

[33] Women who speak or act like men appear quite regularly in Shute's work but are subject to rigorous policing, as will become clear in my later discussion of *Requiem for a Wren*.

[34] Strachan is, of course, in love with Jean himself, but the disability of age ensures that he cannot compete. His muted loss forms the background to the novel's otherwise 'happy' ending.

[35] Her agency disturbs the fundamentalist Christianity of the community, but Shute engineers a dramatic opportunity for her to acquire 'honourable scars', and – in a curious echo of wartime events – for another gullible woman to associate human agency with God's work (284–85).

[36] Joan Riviere analyses the psychology of women who excel in both the professional and domestic spheres, thus avoiding the default assumption that 'intellectual pursuits' were 'almost exclusively' the domain of 'overtly masculine' women ('Womanliness as a Masquerade', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 10, 1929, 303). 'Womanliness', argues Riviere, 'could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the

possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it' (306).

[37] While not suggesting that wartime incarceration was straightforward in any location, Far East POWs experienced a degree of powerlessness and degradation far in excess of that experienced by POWs held in Germany. Yet, the government and the medical profession engaged in what Ben Shephard calls an 'officially orchestrated repression of the "unpleasantness" in the Far East', warning ex-prisoners not to talk to the press or their families about their experiences (*A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914–1994*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2000, 320). Families, in turn, received pamphlets instructing them not to ask questions (321).

[38] Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'*, London: Routledge, 2000, 167.

[39] *A Town Like Alice* is one of the earliest British films to represent this arena of conflict, predating such high-profile productions as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). RAF bases, German POW camps, the North Africa campaign and more or less secret missions within the European theatre of war proved more popular locations for British filmmakers in this period.

[40] Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, 160, 159. The regressive mode is illustrated by the career of Elizabeth Sellars, whose dark hair and strong features seem to have been enough to see her typecast as an ambivalent figure of femininity. Apart from her role as Mary in *The Man in the Sky*, she regularly appeared as a criminal or adulterer, betraying men in *Hunted* (1951), *The Long Memory* (1953) and *The Shiralee* (1957). The regressive mode also involved rewriting history. Women's wartime self-sufficiency –

one of the many factors that destabilised returning veterans – disappears from postwar films. In *Dunkirk* (1958), for example, Richard Attenborough's boat-owner is emasculated by his wife's anachronistic attempt to impose the demands of domestic citizenship on him. Her neediness is suffocating, and he acquires agency as much in escaping the home as in helping the evacuation. See Gill Plain, 'From Shorty Blake to Tubby Binns: *Dunkirk* and the Representation of Working-Class Masculinity in Postwar British Cinema', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 9:2, 2012, 177–97.

[41] While female veterans appear in fiction of the early postwar years (as, for example, in Innes's *Campbell's Kingdom*, 1952), their role is usually to rediscover the 'natural' state of heteronormative compliance temporarily overwritten by war. For the perception that women's roles were for the duration only, see Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, and Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

[42] Nevil Shute, *Requiem for a Wren* (1955), London: Vintage, 2009, 101. Subsequent references appear in the text.

[43] The plot is shaped by Shute's assumptions about appropriate gendered behaviour and ideas of authority. Janet cannot be comforted by her fellow Wrens and seeks reassurance instead from her father. However, when they meet, he is filled 'with the enthusiasm of a boy', reinvigorated by the prospect of joining the D-Day 'party' through the Observer Corps (105). Totally absorbed in his newfound masculine purpose, he is impervious to her needs.

She tells him nothing: the first of many repressions that will lead to her breakdown (108–9).

[44] The doctor, who rejects her thesis as ‘baloney’, nonetheless conforms to postwar orthodoxy, and Shute’s habitual characterisation of women, when he tells the profoundly depressed Janet that ‘a woman without family duties was generally an unhappy woman until she got adjusted to what was an unnatural condition’ (214, 217).

[45] While Alan purposefully seeks Janet, Janet drifts aimlessly until directed towards Coombargana, where service to Alan’s mother becomes another mode of atonement. When she admits to herself a fantasy of marrying Alan, her pathological guilt returns. I’m grateful to Allan Hepburn for this observation.

[46] Janet’s healthy homosociality is perhaps most clearly signalled in her reading a Hammond Innes novel on her postwar transatlantic voyage (207).

[47] Viola is perhaps not entirely free of the past: she spends her free time painting pictures of motor torpedo boats.

[48] A psychologically sound strategy: writing about the Falklands War, Shephard observes that combatants returning slowly by sea in a homosocial group enjoyed better reintegration outcomes than those rapidly returned by air (*A War of Nerves*, 381).

[49] Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (1942), London: Pimlico, 1997, 50; Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, 13.

[50] Dead women frequently enable male agency in Shute's later fiction. In *Round the Bend* (1951), Tom Cutter's foolish first wife – guilty of adultery – commits suicide rather than face her returning husband. In turn, Cutter's guilt drives him to Bahrain and the construction of a successful business. *In the Wet* (1953) is more succinct. Within the space of a sentence, Roger Hargreaves's wife Ethel serves a useful heteronormalising function, brings unspeakable happiness and dies, leaving her husband once again free to travel to the outback.

[51] Hammond Innes, *The Angry Mountain* (1950), London: The Book Club, nd, 26. Subsequent references appear in the text.

[52] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 54–55.

[53] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 41.

[54] Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 42.

[55] Vesuvius undergoes a gender transition over the course of the novel. When first encountered, the volcano is a 'she', glowing provocatively in the background. When she gets angry, her gender is neutralised in an astonishing image of 'a mountain breaking wind from the distended bowels of its rock stomach' (117). Finally, like the novel's hapless hero, the volcano becomes a man: benign yet imposing, and capable of mercy (163).

[56] *The Irish Times* (11 November 1950), Hammond Innes Archive, Cambridge University Library, Add. 9533/14/14/13. *Time and Tide* agreed, observing 'confront him with a Force of Nature and he

becomes immensely convincing' (25 November 1950, Add. 9533/14/14/19).

[57] *The Saturday Review* (17 February 1951); Ibid., Add. 9533/14/14/45.

[58] *Times Literary Supplement* (24 November 1950); Ibid., Add. 9533/14/14/18.

[59] See Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 241–44; the presence of a rather ineffectual femme fatale means the novel is a little more 'American' than most of Innes's work.

[60] Nigel Balchin, *Mine Own Executioner* (1945), London: The Reprint Society, 1947, 147.

[61] Anthony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (1990), London: Routledge, 1992, 166.

[62] Discussing Balchin's novel and the veteran's 'incompatibility with social norms', McLoughlin observes that, in this instance, 'fear that he has talked too much has rendered a veteran unable to talk about his experiences' (*Veteran Poetics*, 91).

[63] Mapping the changing attitudes of the postwar, Alan Allport observes: 'when it came down to it, violence was *foreign*. By 1945 the British people had come to see themselves as citizens of a "peaceable kingdom" characterised by restraint and respect for law and order' (*Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 105–6). Examples of

Europe as a space for the continuation of war by other means are plentiful. A typical instance is provided by John Creasey's *Shadow of Doom* (1946), in which unrepentant Nazi sympathisers seek power through the control of the black market, weaponising commodities from food to medicine. A ludicrous number of explosions ensue. More muted examples include Hammond Innes, *Dead and Alive* (1946) and Eric Ambler, *The Schirmer Inheritance* (1953).

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[64] Hacket might also be read as a model of American individualism and self-reliance, while the circumstances of Farrell's wound link him to the trope of the disabled figure altered by 'hostile incursions from the outside' that have not been 'adequately' resisted (Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 45). In a succinct account of *Moby Dick*, Thomson calls Ahab 'not a self-made man, but a whale-made man' (45), a disturbing testimony to the limits of individualism. There is no doubt that Farrell has been 'made' by Sansevino, but while this leaves him lumbering through the text in a state of disorientated pseudo-monstrosity, it also has benefits that will enable his recovery through a different mode of individualising fantasy. In Sansevino, Farrell has a single figure who can be blamed for the entirety of the war and its damage. The wider community benefits too: embodying 'evil', Sansevino becomes a scapegoat through whom the past can be laid to rest.

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[65] Allport, *Demobbed*, 165.

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[66] The description of the punch reiterates the complex erotics of violence connecting the two men: 'I drove my own fist with all the force I possessed into his face, lusting in the feel of pulping blood and tissue, the satisfying thud and crunch of impact and the beautiful pain of my knuckles' (184).

[67] Allport, *Demobbed*, 106.

[68] Bill Brown discusses the role of objects in the management of anxiety and the sublimation of fear (*A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 4), while Martin Francis records the superstitions of flyers (*The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 124–25). See Introduction, pp 32–34.

[69] In 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', Freud suggests that 'if we are to be judged by our unconscious wishful impulses, we ourselves are … a gang of murderers' (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (1915), ed. James Strachey, Vol. XIV, London: Hogarth, 1978, 297). Lyndsey Stonebridge also draws attention to a telling observation in 'Dostoevsky and Parricide': 'It is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime, psychology is only concerned to know who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done' (Freud, quoted in *The Writing of Anxiety*, London: Palgrave, 2007, 92). Both observations speak to the gratifications offered by George's timely actions.

[70] Farrell desires the violence, others enact it: 'he was afraid. I saw it and the knowledge sang though my body like a lovely song. She was going to murder him' (131). Wartime psychologists' experiments with group therapy and psychodrama are discussed in Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 257–71.

[71] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 54–55.

[72] Basil Davenport concluded: 'this is not for the squeamish. And when … the villain steals the hero's aluminium leg, leaving him helpless, there is about the situation something both a little gruesome and a little grotesque' (29 April 1951), Hammond Innes Archive, Add. 9533 14/14/59.

[73] Innes attempts a similar restorative parable in *Campbell's Kingdom* (1952), in which the hero suffers the seemingly terminal wound of a cancer diagnosis. In this case, Bruce Weatherall is enabled by adversity. Having nothing to lose, he abandons the bleak monotony of domestic England for the mountains of Canada and becomes embroiled in a fight for his grandfather's legacy. The restoration of patriarchal legitimacy combined with man-making open-air jeopardy link psychic and physical rehabilitation. Restored agency is also restored health and, miraculously, his cancer is cured. The same interface of mind and bodily matter is integral to *The Angry Mountain*.

[74] In the bracing words of the unimaginative Hacket: 'You had a tough time. You lost a leg. All right, but don't let it prey on your mind' (71).

[75] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 15.

[76] Rose, *Which People's War?*, 153–59.

Chapter 6

A ‘Machine Genius of the New Aerial Art’

Imagining Douglas Bader

◈

> Thelma, anxious about the renewed and savage air fighting, tried to curb his eagerness, suggesting there would be plenty of battles to come and he was not immortal.
>
> ‘Don’t be damn silly, darling,’ said her husband. ‘I’ve got armour plate behind me, tin legs underneath and an engine in front. How the hell can they get me?’[1]

The ‘Douglas Bader Story’ has been told in biographies, histories, film, television shows, documentaries and, briefly, in Bader’s own words. Most of these accounts have focused on his wartime RAF career and his role as a fighter tactician, but it is not my purpose to engage with these strategic debates, nor to account for the unpalatable politics and prejudices that came increasingly to the fore

in his later life.[2] Rather, it is to examine the potency of the Bader myth in its immediate postwar manifestations: Paul Brickhill's biography *Reach for the Sky* (1954) and its 1956 film adaptation directed by Lewis Gilbert and starring Kenneth More. The book was an immediate bestseller, while the film 'topped the British box office for 1956, took close on £1.5 million, and was the most successful film shown in England since *Gone with the Wind*'.[3] These figures, and Harper and Porter's telling comparison, give some idea of just how big the Bader story was; they also testify to his established wartime celebrity (the media had made much of the legless pilot hero) and to the new appetite for war stories that emerged in the 1950s.[4] As critics have shown, the emergent focus of these stories was the individual, usually middle class, leader, a significant change from wartime film representations of combat which largely focused on a diverse group working together to achieve victory. The decision to film Bader's highly individual story is typical of this transition.[5] Yet, while the film of *Reach for the Sky* appealed for many reasons – its nostalgic recreation of the finest hour, its star power, its inspirational narrative – Bader was not the period's only air ace, nor was his story the only remarkable instance of adversity overcome; so what made this particular narrative so appealing? Some answers can be found in the construction of Brickhill's original account, and in a consideration of what the myth of Bader can tell us about the masculine ideal in the *aftermath* of war.

Firstly, biography presents a very different narrative paradigm to the autobiographies considered in Chapter 4. Alex Zwerdling ascribes a radical uncertainty to the process of memoir, finding writers determined to 'pursue aspects of their own lives associated with loss, solitude, shame, confusion, and discontinuity'.[6] It is a tentative, provisional form of writing, always incomplete, often incoherent: a narrative of self-exposure. Popular biography – while capable of innovative organisation – tends towards a greater coherence. It must 'entail shaping and selection', presenting the subject in a legible and clearly explained form.[7] Nonetheless, while biography builds an

orderly picture of its subject, that image will inevitably be shaped by the attitudes, ideals and beliefs of its author, telling us as much about what culture values at the point of writing as it does about the attitudes of the past. Social conventions also shape – or censor – what it is possible for all forms of life-writing to say. Members of the Guinea Pig club considered it 'bad form' to boast of one's own achievements but entirely reasonable and laudable to praise others. Such expressive displacement is a familiar feature of middle-class English masculinity, and a potent force within the autobiographical narratives considered earlier; biography, by contrast, can tell a different story, unconstrained by the 'virtues' of modesty and understatement. In short, where the limits of postwar expressive possibility compel the autobiographer towards self-effacement, self-criticism or even self-exposure, the biographer is free to 'reach for the sky'.

Although inexperienced in the form, Paul Brickhill was a logical choice of biographer. Not only had he been, like Bader, both a flyer and a POW, he had also already proved himself adept at commemorating warrior masculinity. Working as a journalist when the war broke out, he joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1941 and was shot down in 1943. Incarcerated at Stalag Luft III, he became a supporting player in the events upon which his first bestseller, *The Great Escape* (1950), were based. His follow-up, *The Dam Busters* (1951), a history – or perhaps a 'group biography' – of the RAF's elite 617 Squadron, was even more successful, offering a judicious combination of military strategy and personal detail. Although focused on the squadron's missions and the complications of 'precision' bombing – from the Ruhr dams to Peenemunde, Munich and the Tirpitz – Brickhill enriches his account with succinct portraits of key players such as Barnes Wallis, Guy Gibson, Ralph Cochrane and Leonard Cheshire. Each of these is characterised through familiar tropes, tagged with markers of ideal masculinity – modest, determined, courageous, skilled and loyal – and humanised by quirks or by their rejection of conventional authority. The portrait of Wallis is particularly astute, neatly aligned both with stereotypes

of the absent-minded inventor and with the pragmatic, problem-solving ideal of 'British science' discussed in Chapter 3. This is perhaps the high point of the scientist figure's brief encounter with heroism. *The Dam Busters* opens with an attempt to capture Wallis's methods as he struggles with the technical problem of devising the biggest possible version of the right sort of bomb; it then chronicles the set-backs and resistance he encounters, turning him into an unlikely thriller hero. Looking as mild-mannered as Shute's Theodore Honey, he ventures into the 'brick and stone lairs' of Whitehall 'armed' only 'with sums and theories'.[8] His unusual communication skills and persistence ultimately win through, and he is recognised as an archetypally British underdog hero: 'Hitler had squandered men and materials to shield his "impregnable" rocket sites, only to find, too late, that for all the fabulous concrete on top his *Festung Europe* had no roof … all because a stubborn, white-haired old scientist in 1939 would not believe that the world's experts were right about bombing.'[9] Unassuming and modest, Wallis encapsulates the fantasy of the inspired individual: the little man making a difference in the face of overwhelming odds. He is also (and in contrast to later more ambivalent depictions of scientific figures) allowed to weep for the losses of war, emerging from his tunnel vision to register the consequences of his agency.[10] In the case of the dams raid, abstract theorising translates into the loss not only of a high percentage of the bomber crews but of a devastating number of civilian lives. Yet, the book does not hold back in acknowledging the ruthlessness that attended the deployment of 617 – dubbed, at one point, the 'suicide squadron' – nor the scale and brutality of the bombing war. Brickhill gives short shrift to 'post-war domestic moralists' experiencing qualms about collateral damage.[11] Small wonder Bader liked the book.[12]

Reach for the Sky was Brickhill's first 'conventional' biography, and his choice of title is telling, as a brief comparison with the autobiography of Colin Hodgkinson, Britain's other legless pilot, reveals.[13] After reading a *Sunday Express* story about Bader,

Hodgkinson, who had been seriously injured in a mid-air training collision, made the difficult decision to have a second leg amputated in the hope of returning to active service. Given his lack of experience and RAF connections, his achievement in becoming an operational pilot is, in many respects, more remarkable even than Bader's. However, when he came to write his story, he opted, like many of the Guinea Pigs, for a punning, self-deprecating title. As a phrase, *Best Foot Forward* (1957) may travel in hope, but it also encodes uncertainty and the bathetic acknowledgement that, frankly, neither foot is up to much. The book, in turn, follows Zwerdling's pattern, confessing to fear and doubt, and making explicit much that Brickhill (or his subject) discreetly veils. Where Brickhill writes of the challenges Bader faced, and of the inner demon that drove him, Hodgkinson bluntly observes 'I knew it was not a question of coming to terms with flying but with myself. To prove to myself that I could still be a man amongst men I had to get into the war, and in a fighting role.'[14] A similar distinction applies to the two books' accounts of wounding. While Brickhill briefly alludes to moments of bitterness that Bader shared only with his devoted nurse, Hodgkinson describes the 'humiliation of being amputated': 'I had been proud of my eye and my body; the physical was dominant in my make up. It was my only *amour proper* and, in a world of young men, the only base of my authority.'[15]

Within the cultural constraints of mid-century Britain, then, biography more easily permits the construction of inspirational narratives. Brickhill is free to ascribe confidence, certainty and an overwhelming sense of purpose to his hero, rendering the story as a form of 'national biography'. In this mode, which proliferated during the nineteenth century, public figures were approached in hagiographic fashion, their rough edges and indigestible facets discreetly overwritten to provide a reassuring narrative 'of imperial confidence and assertiveness'.[16] *Reach for the Sky* undoubtedly does this for Bader, tidying him up and turning him into a symbol of the nation's wartime struggle, but the book is also a vivid, almost

picaresque, account of Bader's life and times that reactivates potent tropes of male adventure. Deftly engaging the imaginative space of male fantasy, Brickhill's Bader becomes not just a national monument but a boy's-own hero.[17] Graham Dawson explains the appeal of such a figure:

> The soldier heroes composed in adventure narratives, being ideally powerful and free from contradictions, function psychically and socially as positive imagos to set against the fragmenting and undermining effects of anxiety. They offer the psychic reassurance of triumph over the sources of threat, promising the defeat of enemies and the recovery of that which is valued and feared lost. Having accomplished their quest, they win recognition and bask in the affirmation of their public, for whom they become idealized vessels preserving all that is valued and worthwhile.[18]

Bader, triumphing over multiple sources of threat, fits neatly into this heroic template, and his story is able both to commemorate achievement and to reactivate a 'pleasure culture' of war that had been notably subdued in the years since the conflict's end.[19] But while his military success is undoubtedly significant – he ended the war a group captain with both the DSO and DFC – there is more to the persistence of the Bader myth than this. Indeed, much of the triumph of the story, and its value in a context of postwar reconstruction, lies in Brickhill's romance-plotting. Dwelling at some length on Bader's life in the 1930s, Brickhill gives his hero star power by making him relatable as well as exceptional.[20] Not everyone can be a fighter pilot, but most can understand the quotidian frustrations of not enough money and a boring job. By spending over a third of the book on the creation of the hero as breadwinner, Brickhill generates a protagonist for both war and postwar: unexpectedly, *Reach for the Sky* is as much a rehabilitative narrative of domestic citizenship as a story of heroic adventure. At

the same time, Brickhill's biography actively revalorises the war itself. Unlike nearly all the narratives considered so far, *Reach for the Sky* is not a story about recovering from war but rather one about recovering *through* war – almost, indeed, a fiction of war as therapy. The narrative of reconstruction begins in the aftermath of Bader's personal catastrophe – his 'demobilisation' from the expected script of his athletic, confident, middle-class military life – and this radical dismemberment of male subjectivity ensures that the Second World War becomes not a site of jeopardy but an aspirational goal.

As indicated above, Bader's story operates within a different temporality to the Guinea Pigs' earlier accounts of wounding. Not only were his catastrophic injuries received outside the context of war but readers are also given a full rehearsal of his early years. A brief summary indicates just how important Bader's civilian struggle is to the 'plot' of his life. As Brickhill tells it, Bader was a lonely boy. His mother seemed to prefer his brother, and his father died early from wounds sustained in the First World War. Bader flourished at school due to his exceptional sporting prowess, but his future was jeopardised by financial difficulties; however, he proved sufficiently academically adept to win a scholarship to the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell. Again, he excelled at sport, in particular rugby and cricket. Already showing signs of overconfidence, he was a good enough pilot to be selected for the Hendon aerobatics display. In 1931, on the verge of selection for the English rugby team, he crashed his Bristol Bulldog biplane performing forbidden low-level aerobatics. In a series of operations, his right leg was amputated above the knee, his left below the knee. It was remarkable that he survived both the accident and the shock of the operations: Brickhill attributes this to his ability to respond to a 'challenge', a characterisation to which the book will repeatedly return.[21] While recuperating, Bader met his future wife, Thelma Edwards, and, after initial frustration, mastered the difficult process of walking on cumbersome artificial legs. Given the opportunity to fly again, he proved more than capable, but the RAF judged there was nothing in the regulations covering disabled flyers and he was discharged with

a full pension. Finding employment with a petroleum company, his frustrations showed in a considerable number of car crashes, but his energy eventually found an outlet in golf. The outbreak of war provided the opportunity for him to use his Cranwell connections to force his way back into the RAF. He was rapidly promoted to squadron leader, regaining lost seniority, and was a wing commander when shot down over France in 1941. After repeated escape attempts and provocative behaviour, he was sent to Colditz, the camp for recalcitrant prisoners, where he remained until 1945. Although desperate to continue fighting, he ran out of war, and after leading the Battle of Britain commemorative flight in September 1945, he opted to leave the RAF and return to the Shell organisation, who gave him his own aeroplane and an ambassadorial role. Brickhill concludes his story with a brief meditation on fate: 'I am no churchman … but sometimes a vagrant thought intrudes that some hand not of this world may be using Bader as a vessel bearing another lesson for Man in his struggle. Otherwise, it seems odd that the man most fitted to lose his legs and rise above it should do so' (371).[22]

As this account reveals, the war is the final step in a man-making process largely enacted through the reconstructive conventions of domestic citizenship. This civilian narrative is crucial to the book's appeal. Indeed, in the context of the biography's publication, it is possible to see a palimpsestic relationship emerging between post-accident and postwar temporalities. Through the lens of recovery, the 1930s and the 1950s merge: in both, constructions of masculinity are civic rather than martial, dependent upon the twin pillars of heteronormativity and employment. For many returning soldiers, this domestic manliness was both desired and embraced, but as has been shown, the challenge of finding suitable work and the psychic disruption of separation from family put pressure on long-cherished ideals of home. The routines of peacetime work were also, as Allport has demonstrated, frequently dull in comparison with war's unpredictable deployments, and domestic citizenship needed to be sold as appropriately masculine and demanding. This process

is central to the many narratives of the period that reimagine risk and responsibility, and to those that revisit the exemplary adventures of the past.[23] Male domesticity is simultaneously accepted and resisted – a psychic tension that leads Martin Francis to conclude that narratives of male becoming acquire a particular duality in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Men's 'flight from commitment', he argues, 'took place almost entirely in the realm of the fantasised and the imagined, not in the spheres of the social or the institutional'.[24] Men conformed in body and escaped through fantasies of agency. In such a context, *Reach for the Sky* becomes a rich source of pleasure, not least because it repeatedly enacts an oscillation between escaping and returning to the sublime safety – and dangerous passivity – of women and the domestic.

The aftermath of Bader's accident finds him surrounded by women: 'he did not – yet – miss his legs. He was comfortably in bed … surrounded by attractive girls who brought him anything he wanted like devoted and adoring angels. There was no need to move a finger' (61–62). Simultaneously an endorsement of Bader's heterosexual appeal and a fantasy of plenitude, this vision of the hospital as harem is also deadly. Moving nothing, he does not even register his own emasculation. A few pages later, however, the perils of passivity hit home, as his mother announces she will 'look after him for the rest of his life' (68). Instantly, Bader's insides (both visceral and psychic) react with horror at the prospect of infantile dependency, and he begins to dream of the agency he has lost: dancing, flying and playing sport. Escape from captivity is achieved as, with scant (and typical) disregard for anyone's safety, Bader finds a way to drive a borrowed car with nothing but a peg leg and an umbrella. Through risk and the agency of the machine, masculinity is restored. A second cycle of masculine becoming is achieved through reactivated desire. Woman as nurse cannot provide reconstructive prosthetic agency: her role too closely approximates the maternal, with all that implies regarding the control of the male subject.[25] Woman as wife and possession is

another matter altogether. Bader meets Thelma while in a transitional state. He is mobile after a fashion but not yet equipped with his prosthetic legs. His desire for her becomes a new challenge: he will learn to walk before asking her out. The romance proceeds successfully, but its development again reveals the push-me-pull-you dynamic of what might be termed abject domestic citizenship. Although struggling financially and with few prospects, Bader insists on marriage and, conventionally, that Thelma should not work. Wife as possession has been acquired; a new target – successful breadwinning – has been established.

Bader's legs make the mundane business of commuting and office work into a challenge worthy of narrative; but the story also taps into a specific postwar zeitgeist. Bader is bored and frustrated, and his legs become a 'narrative prosthesis' symbolising the widespread discontent of a later demobilisation demographic feeling the restrictions of peace. This time, Bader's salvation comes through sport. Golf provides a physical challenge, involving effort, endurance and pain, and it brings the rewards of fitness, admiration and domination (although golf was a game widely played by women in the 1930s, Thelma only ever carries the bags). Yet, the powers of golf were limited. Brickhill calls it an 'opiate', dulling the pain of a less than satisfying job and the absence of male approbation (138). Masculinity may be asserted by escaping the domestic but it is ultimately tested and approved among other men, and while homosocial contexts are predominantly supportive – indeed, can vitally sustain male subjectivity – the male group is also the space of competition and the struggle to be recognised as dominant. In the final cycles of Brickhill's narrative, war becomes the new job through which Bader finally has the opportunity to excel, first as a pilot, then as a leader of pilots and finally as a POW, where he was a constant source of irritation to the Germans (144).[26]

Bader's rise through the ranks of the RAF and his confident assumption of leadership is very much the territory of traditional adventure, but even as the book turns to the pleasure culture of war, Brickhill is careful to ensure that his boy's-own hero is a man fit for

the 1950s – a process that requires a not inconsiderable sleight of hand. Bader was a legendarily single-minded and abrasive personality, albeit also a charismatic figure capable of great kindness. Throughout *Reach for the Sky*, Brickhill works hard to soften the edges of aggression and obsession to ensure his Bader will not alienate a postwar audience or blot his heroic copybook. The result is something of a bromance, with the biographer wooed by his subject's often asserted charm. 'One or two' might resent Bader, writes Brickhill, or think him 'conceited', but the discerning recognise his 'super-vitality' (45). Similarly, Bader's rudeness becomes variously 'youthful and tactless impudence' and a purposeful need to prove himself (80, 148, 156–57). Most disturbingly, we learn that the 'victims' of his verbal bullying forgive and forget his behaviour in a matter of minutes (194). The pace of Brickhill's narrative ensures that these glimpses of a difficult, demanding, arrogant and egotistical Bader remain safely in the margins, along with his snobbery and preoccupation with rank and status.[27] The book's hagiographic tendencies and the impact of this uncritical approach on the historical record have been documented, but they need also to be recognised as integral to the success of *Reach for the Sky*, which emerges in timely fashion as not just a commemoration but a celebration of the war as a personal, public and national triumph.

My discussion of Brickhill's man-making strategies has so far emphasised the shaping force of the postwar. The shifting cultural priorities of reconstruction demanded an at least partially domesticated Bader. However, as the invocation of boy's-own narratives suggests, Brickhill's depiction draws heavily on earlier archetypes, in particular, interwar attitudes to flight and technologies of adventure. This is most evident in his accounts of Bader's disability. From the first encounter with the limb-maker Robert Dessoutter onwards, Bader's relationship to his legs is both professional and mechanical. His amputations are treated, by him and those around him, with pragmatism, understatement and an appreciation of fine craftmanship – 'By jove, those are good,' exclaims Dessoutter on first sight of the stumps (77) – and this

enables the construction of an agentic subjectivity far removed from conventional discourses of pity or loss.[28] Bader has been rendered mechanical rather than disabled. This configuration can be related back to the relationship between technology and subjectivity discussed in Chapter 1. Writing in 1954 and 1957 respectively, Nevil Shute and Roland Barthes explore the transition from a symbiotic human–machine interface to an affectless otherness shaped by the sheer complexity – the beyondness – of the jet age. Shute depicts interwar aviation as a space of male becoming enabled by an individual relationship with the machine, while Roland Barthes, theorising the mythology of the jet man, reaches back to the 'hero of classical speed', enhanced by the adventure of flight, for a point of comparison.[29] It is to this interwar subjectivity that Brickhill turns to imagine Bader's relationship to prosthetic masculinity. Bader is a creature of 'propeller-mankind', whose heroes are the dogfight air aces of the First World War, and whose approach to pretty much everything he encounters is to treat it as a sport.[30] Just as Hammond Innes imagined his damaged and disorientated veterans gaining purpose through the work of engineering, so Bader is depicted as quite literally engineering himself. In the process, the potentially disturbing bodily ruptures of amputation, the limitations they encode and the pain they generate, become nothing more than technical problems to be overcome. The spectacle of the damaged male body is rendered safe through its relationship to the conventional male activities of tinkering in the garage and adjusting the carburettor (345). Unlike human legs, the artificial ones are easily and painlessly reparable.[31] When they wear out, they can be replaced. This breezy pragmatism makes Bader's legs central yet peripheral – reassuring readers and reconfiguring disability as a transient phenomenon. In this configuration, through tone and incident, boy's-own adventure, interwar 'propeller' masculinity and domestic citizenship eventually coalesce into the comedy of guilty schoolboy naughtiness: Darling, I broke the car; Sweetheart, I need a new leg (141, 345).

Many writers of the period describe a symbiotic relationship between man and aeroplane – Roald Dahl's short stories, for example, imagine the machine becoming an extension of the body – but this intimacy is not an inevitable feature of the flyer's experience.[32] Colin Hodgkinson describes a deeply ambivalent relationship to flying; indeed, comparing himself to Bader, he confesses that it 'seemed as if he loved the air; I hated it'.[33] Later, admiring the indestructability of aces such as Sailor Malan and Johnnie Johnson, he concludes that their success comes from ceasing to think about the process of flying. For his part, Hodgkinson admits, 'I mistrusted the air, and therefore the machine which bore me through it.'[34] Hodgkinson's discomfort translates into an almost sado-masochistic relationship to flight, something he needs but cannot abandon no matter how much damage it causes. Having become a flight commander at RAF Coltishall, he suffered a second crash on a reconnaissance mission over Amiens, sustaining significant facial injuries. He spent ten months as a POW before being repatriated, with the sight in one eye now permanently damaged; nonetheless, he was once again determined to return to operational flying. Flight, he insists, 'had to serve me still'.[35] The relationship with the air is a vital tool in the ongoing, never complete process of man-making, something Hodgkinson desires and must dominate but which ultimately causes him pain.[36] Describing himself as a 'creature' of Archibald McIndoe's reconstructive skill, Hodgkinson's often visceral account comes close to configuring himself as monstrous; Bader, by contrast, emerges as a textbook cyborg.[37] He is part aircraft even when he is not flying, as is evident from the description of his return to Uxbridge hospital, walking for the first time on his new legs:

> There were roars of welcome and ribald remarks. Streatfeild bawled: 'Long John's got his ruddy undercarriage back.' He walked across to them, concentrating too much to make any answer and feeling that he was going to spoil his entrance at

> any moment by making a three-point landing and denting his tail-skid. One of them pulled out a chair and he just made it.
>
> (87)

The magical fusion of Bader's body with the machine is similarly encapsulated by the account of his first post-accident flight: 'Sitting in the familiar seat … taking the stick in his hand, sent a flush of enchantment through him.' Flying is 'simple and automatic'; landing, he is 'quite unconscious' of his legs (102, 103). Through the repeated imagery of symbiosis, Brickhill cumulatively builds a perception of Bader as enhanced rather than disabled by his legs. Indeed, it adds to the mythos that the non-disabled Bader is graded an 'above average' pilot, while the legless version qualifies as 'exceptional' (39, 155). Bader is becoming a superhuman, a conception developed in accounts of his skill, his bonding with his Hurricane, his confidence, his apparent invincibility and his strategic dismantlability (154, 227–28, 273). After struggling to escape the cockpit of his fatally damaged aircraft, he parachutes to earth minus his right leg: 'How lucky, he thought, to lose one's legs and have detachable ones' (279).

Bader's emergence as a prototypical comic book superhero is obviously not unproblematic. As Davis and others have argued, the configuration of the disabled as superhuman is no less stereotyping than their depiction as pitiful or inspirational. All are categories of excess that distance the disabled person from the normal: they deny the privilege of invisibility. Yet, invisibility was neither sought nor desired by Bader. Even Brickhill admits that he had to be the centre of attention, holding court over a circle that recognised his dominance (272). The downplaying of this assertive hypermasculinity is crucial to Brickhill's biography (and would be even more central to the film adaptation), which maps a man-making trajectory through risk to responsibility and leadership. In the process, war is displaced from its centrality and its impact reconfigured: Bader's accident becomes the moment of battle. Everything else, including the enormity of the war itself, is the

recovery from this personal disaster, a process which culminates in the restoration of the status quo ante – the confident paradigms of team and leadership Bader enjoyed at school and as a Cranwell cadet.

‘A Legend in His Own Lifetime’: Filming Douglas Bader

> This is a story of courage. The courage of a man’s refusal to accept defeat, when defeat seemed inevitable. It is a story we can tell with pride, for it spans the towering eventful years that we ourselves have known, and yet it has no end, for courage has no end.[38]
>
> ‘What do you think you are, Mr Bader, a comedian?’[39]

In making a metonymic connection between Douglas Bader’s refusal to accept defeat and ‘the towering eventful years that we ourselves have known’, the nation and every citizen within it becomes exceptional. Individual suffering is linked to the struggle of the community: the scale of the achievement of this man is also the scale of *our* achievement. It is a potent message and one which indicates how much is at stake in the screen adaptation of *Reach for the Sky*. This film, it announces, will be a biography not just of Bader but of the nation at war. As has been noted, by the mid-1950s, war films had regained their popularity, albeit with a new focus.[40] Many of this new wave of war films were concerned with telling ‘true’ stories and fictionalising events that spoke to cherished ideals of British national identity. Films such as *The Colditz Story* (1955), *The Cockleshell Heroes* (1955) and *Above Us the Waves* (1955) celebrated courage, resilience and ingenuity, while *The Malta Story* (1953), *The Dam Busters* (1955) and *Dunkirk* (1958) sought

simultaneously to memorialise and entertain, selecting from the unreadable complexity of world war microcosmic instances that might speak both to what had been lost and what had been achieved. *Reach for the Sky*, with its heady combination of inspired leadership, bravery and vulnerability, was an obvious choice for adaptation, with producer Daniel M. Angel reputedly buying the rights to the book before he had even read it.[41] But the renewed popularity of war films alone is not enough to explain the film's box-office triumph; nor can it entirely be attributed to its inspirational triumph over adversity narrative. As Martin F. Norden's encyclopaedic account of physical disability at the cinema reveals, such narratives could as easily disappear as take hold of the public imagination.[42] Rather, within the specific production context of British cinema, the film succeeds because of its eclectic approach to genre conventions. Translated to the screen, *Reach for the Sky* becomes not just a war movie but also a romance, a melodrama and a typical 1950s comedy.

The blending of genres that gave the film such wide audience appeal has its roots in the combination of melodrama – conventionally seen as appealing to female audiences – and the male-orientated war picture.[43] But its hybridity goes beyond this conventional gendered distinction. As a war film, it eschews complexity in favour of potent emotional manipulation. Familiar tropes and stock footage of the already mythical Battle of Britain are combined with the representational conventions of the POW film, a formula which spoke to widely shared experiences of constraint, deprivation and loss of freedom during the war years. POW films were among the first war pictures to be made during the postwar period, and films such as *The Captive Heart* (1946) both reveal the quotidian domesticity of survival and emplot a romance with the imagined space of home. Similarly, as Martin Francis has observed, the air war itself is rooted in a domesticity unavailable to other services. With most RAF units based in Britain, he argues, the wartime flyer emerged as 'a complex synthesis of the dedicated

military professional and the devoted family man'.[44] Bader's war, then, is surprisingly domestic, while his melodrama is appropriately martial. Definitions of melodrama have been much debated, but within the broadly realist frame of Gilbert's adaptation, the concept inheres most powerfully in the tension between the representation and the repression of excess.[45] A surging musical score designates Bader's accident and subsequent disability as a catastrophe; performance conventions and script render it prosaic, something to be absorbed within the understated conventions of middle-class masculine norms. Structurally, *Reach for the Sky* offers a reassuringly familiar articulation of the war picture enriched by the comforts of a high-stakes male melodrama that can only end well. To this it adds two further generic components: love and comedy. This is a powerfully romantic telling of the Bader story. Considerable screen time is dedicated to the wooing of Thelma (Muriel Pavlow), and the adaptation also offers the muted anguish of unrequited love through Dorothy Alison's acclaimed performance as 'Brace', the nurse/mother who 'put [Bader] together again'. Alison's micro-expressions suggest Brace's dedication is mingled with desire, and the plangent music that accompanies Bader's farewell kiss confirms this impression. Finally, *Reach for the Sky*'s success can be attributed to its skilful deployment of the most popular genre form of the 1950s: comedy.

Christine Geraghty observes that 'institutions and bureaucracy'[46] – including the military – are at the heart of British film comedy in the 1950s, and it is an unexpected and yet very postwar dimension of this adaptation that it should inject humour into the story of a man so rigorously invested in the hierarchies and order of the RAF. As I will discuss later, much of this levity derives from the choice of a leading man – Kenneth More – who invests Bader with a proliferation of winks and broad cheery grins, but this performance is assisted by director Lewis Gilbert's screenplay, which regularly embraces the bathetic and makes extensive use of physical and situational comedy. While the film is, in most respects, a faithful

condensation of the biography, with resonant lines of dialogue extracted directly from Brickhill's text, this shift in emphasis significantly changes the texture of the Bader myth.[47] In the opening sequence, Bader parades at Cranwell wearing a bowler broken in a motorcycle mishap. As he stands to attention, the crown pops up absurdly like a clown's hat. More's face contorts, but he answers the presiding flight sergeant's dressing down with a witty retort. Comedy enables the hero immediately to be established as a lovable – rather than a threatening – rebel, and the film throughout frames Bader's misbehaviour as cheeky non-conformity rather than unacceptable rudeness. This cheerful disobedience continues even into his leadership phase: when promoted to wing commander, his first act is to throw his paperwork in the bin. In one succinct moment, the film enables the operation of a fantasy that is both historical and contemporary: Bader is an unconventional, inspired leader who gets things done, and an anti-bureaucratic freedom fighter challenging the world of postwar planning.[48]

The transformation of Bader from aggressive egotist to lovable rogue is greatly assisted by the casting of Kenneth More, an actor whose film career to this point had largely been associated with comedy: most notably, his central roles in the box-office hits *Genevieve* (1953) and *Doctor in the House* (1954). More's star persona was robust, cheerful and far from obviously romantic. Andrew Spicer associates him with a transitional phase in representations of English masculinity in which 'the gritty stoicism of the People's War' was absorbed 'within the ethical framework of middle-class endeavour'.[49] More, he suggests, was the 'Edwardian Hero Revived', a 'complex synthesis of the debonair ideal with a contemporary blokeishness that shed all the unacceptable class elements'.[50] Tom Ryall, exploring More's later performance in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1959), confirms this impression, associating the actor with a 'sporty, tweedy bluffness' that is integral to the playfulness characterising this particular adaptation of John Buchan's novel.[51] Ryall also presents a conundrum, quoting Andy Medhurst's

despairing question: 'how can one seriously make connections between the discourses of sexuality … and Kenneth More?'[52] This sketch of More's screen persona might suggest that he would be an unlikely figure to romanticise Douglas Bader, but that would be to misunderstand the romantic conventions of the early 1950s, which largely favoured understated, muted and professional modes of masculinity far removed from the Byronic extremes that had surfaced in the costume melodramas of the late 1940s.[53] Kenneth More – 'temperate', unthreatening, humorous – was, in fact, an ideal actor to continue the process, started by Brickhill, of domesticating and, crucially, democratising, Bader.[54]

It could have been a very different story. The part was first offered to Richard Burton, who by this point in the 1950s had already spent some years in Hollywood and enjoyed notable stage success. His most high-profile screen performance had been the costume epic *The Robe* (1953), in which he played a Roman tribune converted to Christianity, while his theatre roles in the critically well-received Old Vic season of 1953–1954 included Hamlet, Coriolanus and Caliban. If actors can be understood as cumulative products of their past screen performances – their 'habits imply a range of meanings and influence the way [they] will be cast'[55] – the difference between what Burton might have brought to the role and More's portfolio of eccentric waistcoats and sporting good humour could not be more marked. As S. P. Mackenzie observes, Burton's Bader would have weighted the film towards a darker vision of the hero's obsessive personality and perhaps brought out the abrasiveness that Brickhill works hard to obscure.[56] In the light of this initial offer, it seems curious that the second choice should be an actor with such a radically different screen persona, but More effectively captures key dimensions of the Bader who emerges from Brickhill's biography.[57] Spicer's encapsulation of More's persona as a synthesis of the Edwardian and the contemporary makes him well placed to manage the book's combination of imperial and domestic masculinities; Burton, by contrast, would go on to play the antithesis

of both, appearing as Jimmy Porter in Tony Richardson's adaptation of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1959). This speculative contrast of imagined Baders – a deployment of John O. Thompson's 'commutation test' – is not designed to suggest that either More or Burton was somehow the 'right' actor for the part but rather to emphasise the fundamental role of performance in the meaning of any film text.[58] In this case, the casting decision turned out to be a good one: critics and cinema audiences liked More in the role, ensuring that whatever the 'real' Douglas Bader of the 1930s and 1940s might have been, the Bader constructed for 1950s screen consumption would emerge as an icon of postwar masculinity, a plausible domestic citizen and an unexpected romantic hero.[59]

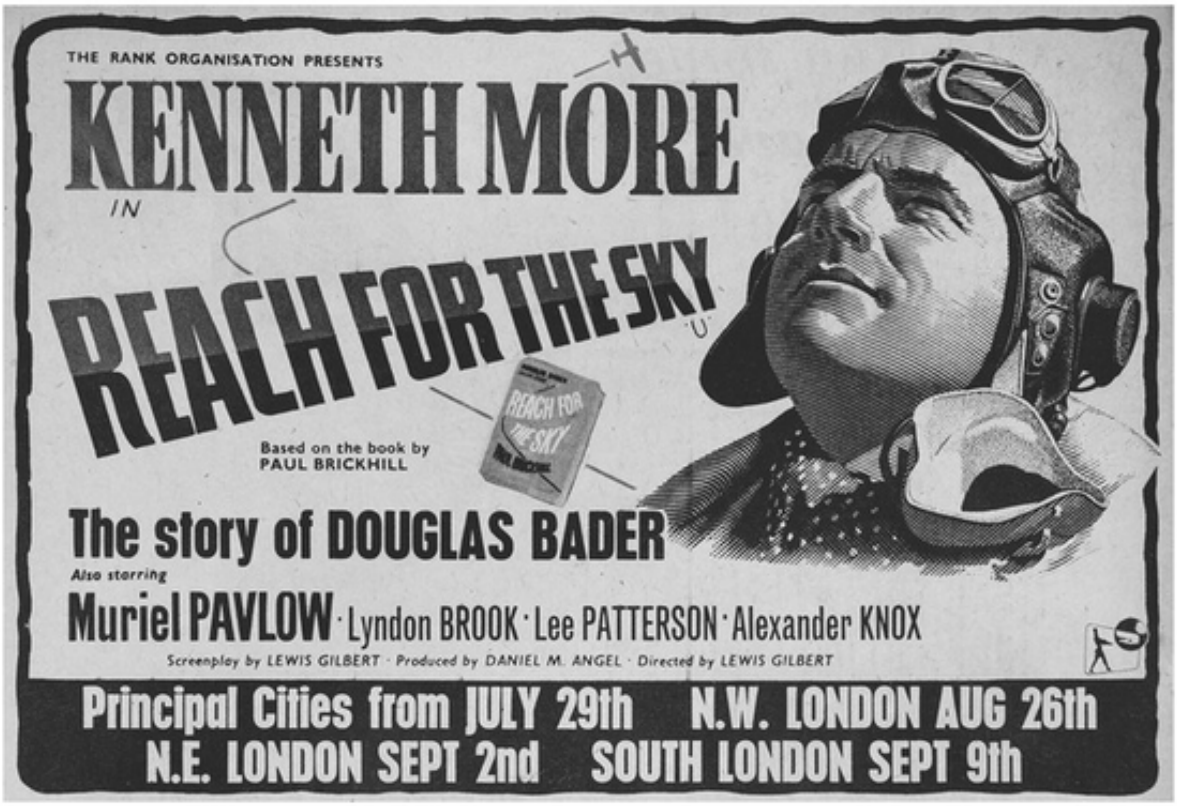
THE RANK ORGANISATION PRESENTS
KENNETH MORE
IN
REACH FOR THE SKY
U
Based on the book by
PAUL BRICKHILL
The story of DOUGLAS BADER
Also starring
Muriel PAVLOW · Lyndon BROOK · Lee PATTERSON · Alexander KNOX
Screenplay by LEWIS GILBERT · Produced by DANIEL M. ANGEL · Directed by LEWIS GILBERT
Principal Cities from JULY 29th N.W. LONDON AUG 26th
N.E. LONDON SEPT 2nd SOUTH LONDON SEPT 9th

Illustration 6.1 *Reach for the Sky*, 1956 press advertisement, David Soulsby/Alamy Stock Photo

The process of democratising Bader is as evident in the second half of the film as in its romantic beginning. Having fought his way back into the RAF, Bader's rise through the ranks is rapidly condensed to prepare for a concentrated focus on the narrative of leadership. Following closely the contours of Brickhill's account, the film depicts Bader's dispatch to 242 Squadron and his confrontation with its initially surly, insolent and frustrated pilots. It is a significant transition in More's performance. When Turner (Lee Patterson), the leader of the group, refuses to stand or acknowledge Bader's authority, his insubordination is greeted with a terrifying bark – imperial More breaks through the domestic veneer – but this display of authority is swiftly followed by kindness and sympathy, as Bader comes to understand the pilots' plight. From this point onwards, he emerges not as the arrogant bully but as the good father protecting and teaching his cadets; and just as the daughter-cadets of Innes's fiction cherish their fathers' legacies, so the pilot cadets of Bader's squadron worship his paternal authority. A sequence of scenes builds the picture of Bader-as-father. He is shown lecturing the pilots on tactics (he stands, centre screen; they sit in eager listening poses); he goes into battle with authority on their behalf; he buys them drinks in the mess; he checks their welfare – integrating shy new arrivals into the established homosocial group – and, through his demeanour, he inspires confidence in them all. Sanderson's voiceover makes this nurturing role explicit: 'his pilots looked on him as a Superman, and his breezy confidence in the air was so reassuring to young pilots flying into battle for the first time'. The film also significantly inserts the family into wartime homosociality. Thelma appears on the margins of the mess scenes, superintending male play, providing the triangulating force of heterosexual legitimacy and assisting in the translation of Bader from alpha male to kindly father-mentor: 'They look so young,' she observes to Bader of his brood. 'I'll look after them,' he replies. In turn, as Thelma waits for news of Bader after he has been shot down, it is her 'sons', led by the devoted Turner, who support her.

The film also departs from the book in its representation of the relationship between man and machine. Metaphors of symbiosis are largely superfluous in a medium that has a (somewhat scruffy) bunch of Spitfires, Hurricanes and biplanes available through which to showcase Bader's sublime aerial mobility.[60] Gilbert's direction, though, does on one occasion offer a visual analogue for Bader's cyborg subjectivity. Having been confronted by 242 Squadron's belief that their legless leader will be 'a passenger in the driver's seat', he wordlessly departs the dispersal hut and provides a demonstration of extreme aerobatics. The film then cuts to a shot of the Hurricane's wing, which fills the top of the screen. The men of 242 Squadron are assembled in a background group to the right. Bader's legs descend from the wing in the top left-centre of the screen, before cutting to a long shot of him walking away. The aeroplane and Bader's legs have been visually conflated and figured as greater than the small group of men who doubted his agency. But while there are several points in the film when Bader is shot leaning on an aeroplane, this is not the primary method through which the film deals with his prosthetic limbs. Rather, the script deploys a comic insouciance to emphasise Bader's refusal to accept the limitations of disability, a strategy that simultaneously provides reassurance to the non-disabled spectator that the damaged body can be made whole. Strategies of deflection and play around the absent presence of Bader's legs might thus be seen as both conservative, in their desire to make amputation safe, and radical in their reframing of the discourse of disability. A simple non sequitur sets the tone. A frustrated Bader is making his first attempts to walk on the prosthetics, while the limb-maker Dessoutter tries to persuade him to use a stick. Dessoutter sets out the problem: 'My dear chap, no-one with your disability has ever walked without one', to which Bader replies 'what's that got to do with it?' By refusing the terms of the discourse – the assumptions regarding amputee agency – Bader also refuses the cultural limits of disability. Equally, though, his determination to stand unaided and resume the conventional shape of a man can be read as a desire to 'pass',

disguising his disability in order to merge into the normative invisibility of an ableist society.

Illustration 6.2 Mechanical agency, *Reach for the Sky*

A more substantial example of the radical exposure and conservative containment of Bader's legs occurs when he undergoes a medical board:

DOCTOR: Well, we've given you a pretty thorough examination. You seem to be 100 per cent fit, apart from your legs …

BADER: It's not fair to drag them in, Sir.

DOCTOR: Oh, why not?

BADER: Well, they … they simply don't exist. It's like saying a man is 100 per cent fit apart from a cold when he hasn't got a cold.

DOCTOR: Or that a flying officer is 100 per cent sane when he hasn't got a brain.

BADER [DEFLATED]: Yes, Sir.

DOCTOR: The legs can't be ignored just like that, you know.

A statement of Bader's supreme health, and by extension his manliness, is followed by the insistence on making his absent legs visible. Bader's response is a deadly serious joke, based on literal-minded wordplay. His logic is exemplary: this is not about the possession of legs, it is about whether he can fly – how can something be wrong with things that do not exist? (This statement holds only if the 'right' body cannot be other than the 'normative' four-limbed version.) Bader shifts the discourse from disability to ability, and further works to reduce the import of the amputations by using the analogy of the 'common' cold. He implicitly equates his situation with an ailment that every man might experience. Yet, the potentially radical import of this comparison, is – in the familiar fashion of British cinema's approach to male achievement or exposure – made safe by the turn to comedy. The doctor's bathetic repetition of Bader's logic resituates Bader in the realm of exceptionality: he is mad, unusual, a lunatic. Bader is serious; the doctor's response turns his seriousness into a joke.[61]

Nonetheless, as the doctor notes, the legs cannot be ignored and they must be represented. The use of fades and cuts between More's face and the prosthetic legs, along with 'a contraption of steel plates and straps' that held his knees and feet rigid,[62] enabled the actor to perform Bader's characteristic walk, but in terms of signifying what prosthetic limbs might mean – physically and psychologically – the film relies more heavily on symbolism. In places, as in the case of the rugby boot that Bader sees on returning to his room at RAF Kenley, the film again follows the book;[63] elsewhere, it risks a rare venture into more cinematic language. In one of the film's most sweetly romantic scenes, played with controlled charm and thoughtfulness by More, Bader and his friends Peel and Streatfeild roll up at the Pantiles restaurant for afternoon tea. In a comic sequence, they enter the garden in a catwalk of

wounded masculinity. Peel, with his leg in plaster, prompts sighs of ‘poor dear’ from two genteel ladies. Streatfeild’s plaster-encased arm generates raised eyebrows and the hint of a thrill; Bader, on crutches, with folded trouser and a single peg leg, brings tea-drinking to a dead stop, before the camera cuts to a crusty old buffer inserting his monocle and a woman flipping out her lorgnettes. Finally, the camera cuts to Thelma, whose gaze is curious rather than prurient; but the overall impact is to render Bader spectacular – the object of abject fascination – to which he and his companions appear oblivious. The trio make themselves comfortable and are served by Thelma, whose desirability is immediately commented upon. After a brief semi-comic flirtation, she leaves a pencil on the table and Bader jumps up to return it, holding the pencil in his mouth as he navigates his crutches. As he returns to the table, the camera lingers on a rear view that makes all too explicit the absence of both legs, but this image of loss is complicated by the movement’s showcasing of his broad shoulders and the purposeful movement towards his seated companions. Peel and Streatfeild, noting his evident admiration, encourage Bader to ask Thelma out; while they remain seated, Bader stands in medium shot. ‘I don’t suppose she’d want to,’ he replies, glancing down at his body, the missing bits of which are not in the frame. Looking up, he rallies and concludes ‘you just wait until I find my feet’. After this shot, with Bader framed above his companions, newly empowered by desire and anticipating the return of what has been lost, the film cuts to an establishing shot of the Ministry of Pensions Hospital at Roehampton before cutting again to a full-screen image, horizontal and disembodied, of an above-knee prosthetic leg, complete with straps.

Illustration 6.3 Disability as romance, *Reach for the Sky*

Illustration 6.4 Disability as real, *Reach for the Sky*

By the conservative standards of the film, this constitutes a smash cut, an attempt to jolt or shock the audience with a sudden visual transition. Both intra- and extra-diegetically, the romance of repair is destroyed. This is what 'finding his feet' will mean for Bader, who will be confronted by the difficulty of learning to walk in the scenes that follow; for the audience, the romance with disability – the noble wounded warrior – is brought up short by the reality of a 'tin' leg. The cumbersome materiality of the object both underlines the scale of the challenge facing Bader and acts as a necessary preface to More's performance, as a non-disabled actor, of the process of walking on artificial legs.

As indicated earlier, More's performance met with near universal acclaim, but it is worth pausing to consider the terms of that approbation and what it can tell us about the limits of bodily representation, and in particular of the national male body, in the 1950s. Reviewing the film in *The New Statesman* , William Whitebait drew favourable comparison with Hollywood depictions of disabled servicemen:

> The most difficult part has been achieved best: the hovering between life and death, the frightful affectionate months in hospital, the learning to walk. Vagueness here would have been fatal; all is made sharp; we are fascinated. No one need hesitate to see the film for fear of encountering the sort of treacly exhibitionism forced on us with the armless ex-soldier of *The Best Years of Our Lives*.
>
> A good deal of the credit for a Bader one can't help taking to and admiring is due to Mr Kenneth More, who could breeze his way through anything: I should like to see him as Iago, for example. He rides his present part splendidly, besides never allowing a moment's disbelief in those stumps and their tameable adjuncts.[64]

In these sentences, Whitebait takes his readers on a journey of reassurance around a film already well designed to override national anxieties. Two points stand out. Firstly, Whitebait's analysis reveals a fundamental embarrassment around the exposed male body. This can be discussed with precision (the mechanics of repair are 'made sharp') but must not be revealed as vulnerable or contaminated by the feminine (the 'frightful affectionate months in hospital').[65] It is above all essential that this body, however severe its physical wounds, maintains its psychic integrity. As with Innes's disorientated pilot Dick Farrell, a missing limb or two can be accommodated as long as the hard shell of masculine competence and British emotional restraint stays in place. The character of the bilateral hand amputee, Homer Parish, in *The Best Years of Our Lives* – shown experiencing anger, frustration, humiliation and helplessness – is unbearable to Whitebait's conception of appropriate masculinity, both too sentimental in terms of narrative and too spectacular in terms of the exposure of the wounded body.[66] Secondly, the description of the stumps and 'their tameable adjuncts' conjures an absurd but nonetheless empowering image of Bader as a circus master, cracking a whip and bringing his unruly mechanical components under control. Although euphemistic in its refusal to name the prosthetic, it is a vision of augmentation rather than lack.

This description of More-as-Bader emphasises qualities both highly valued and under threat in the cultural transitions of mid-1950s Britain. In its representation of masculinity, *Reach for the Sky* is residual in its celebration of understatement, restraint and 'boy's-own' heroism, and yet powerfully contemporary in its vision of a man bringing a destabilising new reality under control. In a changing world, it endorses traditional British masculinity – figured as resilient enough to withstand the wounds of war – and, in a familiar trope of postwar nation-building, contrasts it against an immature American other. Whitebait, while critically aware of the film's emotional manipulation, nonetheless considers it safe and reassuring. The actor is in control, and the audience can relax knowing that the hero

both survives and thrives. Indeed, thanks to the film's strategic equation of the 1930s and 1950s, he has already surmounted contemporary difficulties. Everything, the film insists, will come out right in the end, and this reassurance is possible because the story so profoundly equates disability and the ongoing long-term consequences of war and demobilisation.

Writing in 1956, Bader observed that:

> The goal of a disabled person is to get back to normal as far as is reasonably possible. … People's ideas of a normal life vary, and what you wish to achieve is your idea of a normal life. Whatever it is, one thing above all is essential, and that is to decide not to be a burden on your friends and relations. … To my way of thinking, a disabled man who has achieved independence is no longer disabled.[67]

In terms of disability, this statement is disorientating in its combination of radical and reactionary terminology. A desirable 'normality' is invoked, only for the concept to be defined as entirely, and productively, subjective. The assumption that the disabled could be a 'burden' on others is countered by the belief that independence can be achieved. The disabled man (sic) is understood as making decisions, having willpower and agency. That such a formulation of disability has limits is obvious – it can offer little to counter the stigma faced by people with invisible disabilities, cognitive impairment or long-term conditions that do not permit economic self-sufficiency – but it is intensely pragmatic, appropriately national and, within the context of the 1950s, paradigm-shifting. It is also easily translated into a statement about demobilisation. As the first part of this book indicated, popular culture represented the demobilised man as disturbed, adrift, damaged, potentially dangerous and unable to adapt to the norms of postwar society. He needed work, and ideally a wife, but struggled to find or hold suitable employment, let alone settle down. He was caught in the interstices of the transition from homosocial warrior masculinity to

heteronormative domestic citizenship, and he needed – as the idiom of the time would have it – to 'get back on his feet'. Symbolically, it is an open goal, and *Reach for the Sky* accepts it, asserting that the masculinity that won the war will not be defeated by the new battles of peace. Through More's performance, Bader emerges as Superman and Everyman, the triumphant embodiment of a nation both imperial and domestic:

> The blood, toil, sweat and tears are here: and so is the unconquerable spirit. In an intensely difficult role, Kenneth More gives a very fine performance. Lewis Gilbert's screen play … has contrived to pepper the dialogue with the kind of insouciant, impudent retorts which no other actor can deliver so well, but if these sometimes remind us of Mr. More's other films, it seems to me no less valid a piece of casting, *for it is just the type of young man whom Mr. More portrays so well who were typical of Mr. Bader's generation in 1940*. … [More] seems to me true to the spirit of those British characteristics of which Bader is in so many ways the epitome.[68]

The metaphorical utility of Bader's life for a society still negotiating the legacy of war is undisputable, but his mythologisation nonetheless emerges at a particularly unstable moment in the construction and policing of acceptable masculinities. For a brief period in the war, 'ability' was uncoupled from conceptions of the normative body and was instead redefined through purely practical considerations. Under these revised terms, not just Bader but Colin Hodgkinson was able to argue that it was the ability to fly a Spitfire that mattered, not the number of a man's limbs.[69] Yet, war's capacity to fracture norms was superseded by the postwar's desire to reinstate them. The reconfiguration of disability, like women's public citizenship, was for the duration only: both were ultimately overridden by the peacetime return of conventional assumptions surrounding gender and bodily integrity. In *Reach for the Sky* and numerous postwar fictions, disability acted as a potent

metaphor for demobilisation; more disturbingly, at war's end, demobilisation would quite literally disable a cohort of non-normative men.

Bader's goal of achieving 'a normal life' was, at least initially, also a national goal. Capturing this chimera was, however, contingent on negotiating loss, whether that be grief for lost loved ones or the disorientation of separation from sustaining wartime communities . Brickhill suggests that Bader's urgent acquisition of the component parts of normative citizenship – employment, a wife, a car – functioned as much to compensate for the loss of the Air Force as for his amputations: 'In one way separation from the Air Force would hurt him more than separation from his legs. The Air Force became a kind of symbol: return would mean that he was a normal man: rejection would mean that he was a helpless cripple' (69). This is unusually emotive language, and it speaks to the power of organisational structures to legitimise male subjectivity. The RAF had become Bader's home, and in exile, he finds himself facing his first 'proper taste … of the unsheltered world where there are few rules and fewer privileges and you scrambled with all the others for your share' (120). By the time he left the Air Force for the second time, judging that he would find little satisfaction in the postwar 'austerity' military, he was sufficiently famous for these considerations to be less pressing (362). They would, however, remain all too pressing for a different cohort of RAF veterans, the members of the Guinea Pig Club. The prospects for men not only disabled but disfigured by war could not have looked good. They faced competition for work, the challenge of social interaction and, in many cases, the ongoing negotiation of debilitating health conditions. Yet, many of these men successfully made the transition to domestic citizenship. How they did that, and the rather different prosthetic agency that enabled them, brings this study to a close.

[1] Paul Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky* (1954), London: Cassell, 2000, 201.

[2] Much of the discussion of Bader's life focuses on air strategy, in particular, his role as an advocate of the 'Big Wing' formation. More substantial biographical accounts include Laddie Lucas, *Flying Colours: The Epic Story of Douglas Bader*, London: Hutchinson, 1981; John Frayn Turner, *Douglas Bader: A Biography of the Legendary World War II Fighter Pilot* (1995), Shrewsbury: Airlife Publishing, 2001; S. P. Mackenzie, *Bader's War: 'Have a Go at Everything'*, Stroud: Spellmount, 2008; and Dilip Sarkar, *Fighter Ace: The Extraordinary Life of Douglas Bader, Battle of Britain Hero*, Stroud: Amberley, 2014; he was the subject of *This Is Your Life* in 1982 and a demythologising Channel 4 *Secret Lives* documentary in 1996. Bader tells his own story as a contributor to Sir Ian Fraser's *The Conquest of Disability: Inspiring Accounts of Courage, Fortitude and Adaptability in Conquering Grave Physical Handicaps*, London: Odhams Press, 1956, but otherwise confined himself to co-writing *Fight for the Sky: The Story of the Spitfire and Hurricane* (1973). For his reactionary politics, see Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939–1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 193–94; and Sarkar, *Fighter Ace*, 326–27.

[3] Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 176. John Ramsden records that '*Reach for the Sky* not only appeared in hardback and in paperback, but also (in its first three years) in an abridged version, in a special young people's edition, and in a simplified English edition' ('Refocusing "The People's War": British War Films of the 1950s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33:1, 1998, 39). Mackenzie, meanwhile, notes the book's success across the political spectrum, attracting glowing reviews from both the *Daily Mail* and the *New Statesman* (*Bader's War*, 164).

[4] Mackenzie notes that although the Directorate of Public Relations at the Air Ministry generally discouraged publicising the activities of individual pilots, 'the fall and rise of the legless air ace was simply too good to pass up' (*Bader's War*, 83).

[5] For discussion of the changing formula of the war picture, see Neil Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle Class: British War Films of the 1950s', in *Re-viewing British Cinema, 1900–1992*, ed. Winston Wheeler Dixon, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

[6] Alex Zwerdling, *The Rise of the Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 4.

[7] Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 10. My concern here is with popular rather than literary or experimental forms of biography. Popular biographies of public figures, or national heroes, whether critical or admiring, usually accept the premise that writing a life is a viable undertaking and there is a story that can be told.

[8] Paul Brickhill, *The Dam Busters* (1951), London: Pan, 1983, 33. Wallis, we're told, has 'a mind virtually on another plane' (11).

[9] Ibid., 218.

[10] Ibid., 109.

[11] Ibid., 194. As discussed in Chapter 3, the scientist would become an increasingly ambivalent figure in postwar narrative, and while Brickhill subordinates questions about the destructive

power of technology to the business of winning the war, the portrait of Wallis as absent-minded inventor is at times uncomfortably juxtaposed against the account of his technological potency. This benign figure was responsible for some of the most devastating ordnance of the Second World War: the bouncing bomb, the concrete-penetrating 'Tallboy' and the ten-ton 'Grand Slam'.

[12] His opinion, the 'best wartime story of the RAF', appears on the cover of the 1983 Pan edition.

[13] The Soviet Union also boasted a double-amputee fighter pilot, Alexei Maresyev, whose embellished adventures are told in Boris Polevoi's *A Story about a Real Man* (1946), Oxford: Oxford City Press, 2009. Even allowing for poetic licence, it is a fascinating exploration of ideal masculinities, as the designation a 'real man' is appended not just to the hero but to the writer and several members of the supporting cast. In 1948, the story was filmed and turned into an opera by Sergei Prokofiev.

[14] Colin Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward*, London: Odhams Press, 1957, 81.

[15] Ibid. Bader is credited, in his darkest hour, with an echo of Ivor Gates: 'I'd rather be killed outright than left like this' (Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky*, 68). This conventional cliché stands in marked contrast to Hodgkinson's acknowledgement of the psychic complexity of his loss. Francis discusses the comparative emotional openness of Hodgkinson's 'engaging' memoirs (*The Flyer*, 135–38); the book is also significant for its frank account of the difficulties of postwar readjustment.

[16] Lee, *Biography*, 63.

[17] Mackenzie comments on Bader's national status and his 'boy's own' appeal, concluding: 'little wonder that he subsequently ended up number one in a schoolboy poll of favourite heroes' (*Bader's War*, 166).

[18] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, 282.

[19] Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000, 223–24.

[20] Definitions of stardom posit that stars 'accomplish the difficult task of being both ordinary for the purposes of identification and extraordinary for the purposes of admiration' (Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930–1939*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, 156).

[21] Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky*, 57. Subsequent page numbers are given in the text.

[22] Brickhill here adopts a long-standing mode of disability representation that Ato Quayson terms '*disability as signifier of ritual insight*' (*Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 47). He is imagined as a figure who, like Philoctetes, transgresses (arrogance, vanity, the crash), spends years in the wilderness (the 1930s) and is then discovered to be necessary to military victory – albeit that Bader, unlike his wounded Greek precursor, is all too willing to return home to the RAF. The sentiment might more

bluntly be described as ‘inspiration porn’, a hyperbolic manifestation of the ‘overcoming narratives’ that frequently shape – and distort – the presentation of disabled lives. See Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, London: Verso, 1995, 106; and G. Thomas Couser’s discussion of ‘supercrip’ narratives in *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, 203.

[23] Risk and responsibility are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) was a particularly potent exemplary adventure revisited in this period. See Martin Francis, ‘A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War’, *Gender and History*, 19:1, 2007, 163–85.

[24] Francis, ‘A Flight from Commitment?’, 181.

[25] Sandra M. Gilbert suggests that ‘the rhetoric and the iconography of nursing’ in the First World War implies a role reversal from which women emerge as ambivalent figures, simultaneously serving and triumphant over the invalid male (‘Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War’, in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, 209). The ‘trauma of the male subject’s superfluity’ is also central to Kaja Silverman’s analysis of the 1947 film *The Best Years of Our Lives* (*Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, London: Routledge, 1992, 65–90).

[26] Brickhill’s account of Bader’s time as a POW is an example of selective narrativising, and an index of the shifting mood of war representation. Historians of captivity in the European theatre of

war observe the ambivalence felt towards disruptive prisoners, whose 'goon baiting' jeopardised the stability of the community. While there was gratification to be had in pushing back against authority, most men had to find an accommodation with the psychology of captivity; they needed structure and the Red Cross parcels that could be withheld from the group as punishment for individual transgressions (Adrian Gilbert, *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe, 1939–1945*, London: John Murray, 2006, 266, 278). Bader makes brief appearances in P. R. Reid's *The Colditz Story* (1952) and *The Latter Days at Colditz* (1953), described in the former as 'irrepressible, undaunted by catastrophe, a magnetic leader and a dangerous enemy' (*The Colditz Story* (1952), London: Cassell, 2001, 168–69). See Gill Plain, 'Before the Colditz Myth: Telling POW Stories in Postwar British Cinema', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 7:3, 2014, 269–82, which charts the transition in cinema representations of POW life – from domestic endurance to sporting adventure – in the ten years after the war's end, and S. P. Mackenzie's *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, for full consideration of what 'Colditz' came to mean.

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[27] Francis describes Bader as a 'controversial' combination of courage and aggression, noting that many of his 'comrades, subordinates, and superiors came to loathe a man they regarded as an insensitive bully' (*The Flyer*, 133–34).

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[28] Integral to this is the narrative's limited acknowledgement of pain. In hospital, Bader experiences 'cruel', relentless and inescapable pain (56, 66), but even in these early stages, it is associated with life. The critically ill Bader wakes dreamily content, only to hear a nurse announce that he is dying. As he rallies, 'the pain came back to his leg. Somehow he did not mind this time; it was almost satisfying because he felt he was normal again' (57). Pain, then, is another problem to be negotiated and its stimulus

leads to innovation – as, for example, when the agony of sunburn forces him to discard, and recognise as superfluous, the shoulder straps of the body-belt for the prosthetic limbs (99). As the book progresses, the management of legs and stumps is always configured in practical terms entirely appropriate to masculine norms that demand understatement and limit emotional expression. It is not until the final pages that Brickhill notes that the 'legs are never entirely comfortable and often are hurting him though he will not confess it' (369).

[29] Nevil Shute, *Slide Rule: The Autobiography of an Engineer*, London: Heinemann, 1954, 4; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), London: Vintage, 1993, 71.

[30] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 72.

[31] Bader's legs intermittently break down, usually while playing golf or squash, creating a powerful impression of his energy and power. Brickhill also provides an anecdote in which Bader improves his golf by taking half an inch off one leg to achieve 'a permanent uphill lie' (140).

[32] 'the Spitfire was not a Spitfire but a part of his own body; the muscles of his arms and legs were in the wings and in the tail of the machine so that when he banked and turned and dived and climbed he was not moving his hands and his legs, but only the wings and the tail and the body of the aeroplane; for the body of the Spitfire was the body of the pilot, and there was no difference between the one and the other' (Roald Dahl, 'Death of an Old Old Man' (1946), *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying*, London: Penguin, 2010, 18).

[33] Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward*, 82.

[34] Ibid., 149.

[35] Ibid., 210.

[36] Hodgkinson's self-awareness is evident in his description of the war's end, which he desired no more than Bader: 'for me, without background, or job or home, the war in the air was everything. I had lived towards it, through it and for it; it was the medium that had soldered my manhood to my useless stumps' (Ibid., 216).

[37] Ibid., 210. In Chapter 1, I suggested that the cyborg might figure a spectrum of hybridity, from the enhancement to the obliteration of the human. Compared to the protean vision of Donna Haraway, Bader's cyborg hybridity is distinctly prosaic: a 'person whose physical tolerances or capabilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by a machine etc.; an integrated man–machine system' (Oxford English Dictionary).

[38] Cinema trailer, *Reach for the Sky* (1956).

[39] Parade sergeant, *Reach for the Sky*.

[40] Christine Geraghty and S. P. Mackenzie both situate the film within the emergent paradigm of inspired individual leadership. Mackenzie makes a comparison with the earlier *Angels One Five* (1952), noting that if the first film was about the triumph of 'The Few', then '*Reach for the Sky* was about The One' (*The Battle of Britain on Screen: 'The Few' in British Film and Television Drama*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 66). Geraghty,

meanwhile, suggests the film is one of a number that 'reaffirm [the] natural authority and moral position' of the isolated leader (*British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the 'New Look'*, London: Routledge, 2000, 188). Reviews of the film, however, indicate ongoing ambivalence about the war film genre. Nearly all critics praise the representation of Bader's personal struggle; many simultaneously express reservations about the depiction of war, either on account of déjà vu (*Daily Sketch, Sunday Express*) or anti-climax (*Evening Standard, Spectator*).

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[41] Kenneth More, *More or Less* (1978), London: Coronet, 1979, 198; Mackenzie, *The Battle of Britain*, 61–62.

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[42] Martin F. Norden offers the example of *The Eternal Sea* (1955), perhaps the closest American analogue for *Reach for the Sky*. The film is a biopic of John Hoskins, who served in the US Navy during the Second World War and the Korean War – ultimately rising to the rank of vice admiral – in spite of losing a foot in 1944. Described by Norden as 'an outstanding visualisation of a veteran's refusal to let a disabling circumstance and others' attitudes towards it stop him from pursuing a career', the film was a box-office failure that has largely been forgotten (*The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994, 200).

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[43] Combining romance, war and melodrama has a long precedent. Timothy Barnard argues that King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925), a film about an American soldier who loses a leg in the First World War, co-scripted by amputee veteran Laurence Stallings, imagines regeneration through a redemptive romantic conclusion: '*The Big Parade* presented a new kind of male star spectacle that was both romantically desirable and physically disabled in a way that appealed to audiences of both men and women as an

unprecedentedly “real” instance of postwar manhood’ (‘“The Whole Art of a Wooden Leg”: King Vidor’s Picturization of Lawrence Stallings’s “Great Story”’, in *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability on Film*, eds. Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotić, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010, 37). The contexts of Barnard’s analysis – the First World War, America, Hollywood – are far removed from the conventions of British cinema and, by the 1950s, a prosthetic leg had become a less spectacular appendage than in this ‘shocking’ early deployment. However, there is no doubt that *Reach for the Sky*, like *The Big Parade*, appealed to both male and female audiences, and made a romantic hero out of a disabled man.

[44] Francis, *The Flyer*, 85.

[45] Carolyn Williams describes the ‘rhythm of melodrama’ as ‘periods of suspenseful absorption pierced by suddenly intensified moments of shock, terror, or sentiment’ (*The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 2). For debates around the proliferation and extent of melodramatic modes, see Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds.), *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media and National Cultures*, Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 2018.

[46] Geraghty, British Cinema in the Fifties, 56.

[47] The adaptation conveys information, and directs audience sympathy, through succinct exchanges between members of the supporting cast, or through the voiceover delivered by Johnny Sanderson (Lyndon Brook), a compilation figure constructed from several of Bader’s friends and colleagues.

[48] Throwing paperwork in the bin was tried and tested Brickhill shorthand for inspirational leadership. Guy Gibson does likewise in *The Dam Busters* (60).

[49] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, 28.

[50] Ibid., 39.

[51] Tom Ryall, 'One Hundred and Seventeen Steps towards Masculinity', in *You Tarzan: Masculinities, Movies and Men*, eds. Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993, 162.

[52] Ibid.

[53] By the mid-1950s, Gainsborough's sexually charged stars Stewart Granger and James Mason had both departed for Hollywood.

[54] Bader did not take kindly to the adaptation, arguing with most of the people involved and refusing to attend the film's premiere. More reports his distrust of filmmakers (*More or Less*, 199), while director Lewis Gilbert describes multiple instances of his obstreperousness. Writing over fifty years later, Gilbert was still sufficiently angry to caption a poster of *Reach for the Sky* with the words 'Kenneth More gave Douglas Bader a charm he didn't have' (*All My Flashbacks*, London: Reynolds and Hearn, 2010, np). The testimonies to Bader's charisma that run through the work of his biographers suggest this is an overstatement, but it nonetheless

draws attention to the ongoing process of domesticating the hero for a postwar market.

[55] James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (1988), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 158.

[56] Mackenzie, *The Battle of Britain*, 62

[57] Once Burton was out of the picture, it was a role actively sought by More (*More or Less*, 197–200).

[58] John O. Thompson's influential article 'Screen Acting and the Commutation Test', *Screen*, 19:2, 1978, 55–69, considers the exercise of imagining a different, ideally somehow 'inappropriate', actor in a role to expose normative assumptions about bodies and culture.

[59] Critics across the board applauded More. *The Manchester Guardian* praised his 'extraordinary capacity for expressive understatement' (7 June 1956), *The Sunday Express* called it 'inspired casting' (8 July 1956) and *The Times* declared 'the film belongs to Mr Kenneth More' (9 July 1956). The *Daily Worker*'s entertaining review suggested that More 'is probably a great deal more like the popular conception of Bader than Bader is himself' (7 July 1956), while C. A. Lejeune in *The Observer* recognised the actor's vital role in the film's success: 'More, as Bader, makes us like the man so much' (8 July 1956).

[60] By the early 1950s, it was already difficult to muster sufficient Hurricanes and Spitfires to approximate a squadron on screen (McKenzie, *The Battle of Britain*, 63).

[61] Implicit in this exchange is the absence of a framework for thinking of disability in anything other than negative terms. In the biography, the absurdity of the concept 'able-bodied' is brought home in a wry aside. When Bader is readmitted into the RAF, he returns as a regular officer on full pay. At the same time, he is told that his disability pension will continue. He is simultaneously categorised as 'hundred per cent fit and hundred per cent disabled' (Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky*, 150).

[62] More, *More or Less*, 199.

[63] A paragraph in Brickhill's account (98) turns into a scene that follows the film's typical pattern of oscillation between the exposure and denial of pain. Arriving at Kenley in hearty good cheer, More presents Bader in comic bombast mode, waving his uniformed legs at his friend Harry Day: 'Take a good look. The very latest: knobbly knees, hairs, corns, the lot.' Turning, he sees the open door of the wardrobe and his face falls; the camera cuts to a close-up of a single rugby boot. Regrouping, Bader turns to Day and argues for the opportunity to fly again. It is a rapid fluctuation of mood: renewed agency turns to loss, turns to the search for prosthetic agency through flight.

[64] William Whitebait, *The New Statesman*, 14 July 1956.

[65] Frank Jackson, in *Reynolds News*, was more explicit about the fate Bader escapes: 'We British, as a race, are scared stiff of women. We distrust them. We fear being dragged into their emotional storms … of being 'owned' … of having to give up our masculine freedom … of being pulped down from a man into a husband …' (8 July 1956; ellipses in original).

[66] Silverman discusses the implications for the fiction film of casting an amputee, Harold Russell, in the role of Homer. While the director, William Wyler, wanted to use Russell's irreparable body to emphasise the 'real' of war, and to trouble audience complacency, Silverman observes that in a film exploring multiple instances of male lack, Russell's hooks complicate paradigms of representation, 'seeming to point beyond the text and Russell's acting to his body and the traces left there by the war' (*Male Subjectivity*, 73). David Gerber interrogates a different problem in the film. Why would the confident and forward-looking Russell help 'to create a character who is weak in resolve and ambition, and who lacks self-confidence and a spirit of independence'? An interview conducted in 1990 leads him to conclude that Russell was under 'intense pressure' to be a 'cheerful, inspirational role model … and to model his life within the narrative of triumph over adversity'. Acting enabled him to express feelings of anger not usually permitted him, and his appearance confronted cinemagoers, forcing them to acknowledge the impaired body rather than look away ('Anger and Affability: The Rise and Representation of a Repertory of Self-Presentation Skills in a World War II Disabled Veteran', *Journal of Social History*, 27:1, 1993, 6, 10, 20–21). William Simpson would have recognised these sentiments and the frustrations of being inspirational; Bader's position is harder to determine. He was happy to have his biography written, and seemingly loved being the centre of attention, but his image was carefully curated within the parameters of normative masculinity (in uniform, playing sport or getting into aircraft). He was almost never photographed with his prosthetics exposed. After the war, however, he became a disability advocate and was ultimately knighted for this work.

[67] Douglas Bader, 'I Am Going to Walk', in Fraser, *The Conquest of Disability*, 156.

[68] Peter Forster, *Financial Times*, 9 July 1956; emphasis mine.

[69] It is an obvious irony that war – the greatest source of acquired disability in the twentieth century – should have had such a liberatory impact on the definition of ability. For a fascinating account of the codification of 'fitness to serve' and the role of the military, and academia, in constructing the normative body in America, see Anna Creadick, 'Disability's Other: The Production of "Normal Men" in Midcentury America', in *Phallacies: Historical Intersections of Disability and Masculinity*, eds. Kathleen M. Brian and James W. Trent Jr, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. For the extent to which all male bodies were regulated during the war, see Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, 198–205.

Chapter 7

Coda

Of Pigs and Men

◈

What's all this fuss about not being able to settle down in Civvy Street? Almost daily the papers give instances of chaps getting mixed up with the Law under such headings as: 'Civilian Life Too Dull So Shot Mother-in-Law,' or 'Three Times Bigamist Says He Is Cheesed-off With Civvy Street,' or even 'Ex-serviceman Overcome with Ennui Fires Orphanage.'

Is this sort of thing true of Guinea Pigs too? … Is it that Guinea Pigs are particularly elusive, always escaping the Hand of the Law, in their pursuit of Civvy Street excitement? No! Not at all!

The real reason is that East Grinstead has put us demobilised Guinea Pigs into Civvy Street right end up.[1]

We do well to remember that the privilege of dying for one's country is not equal to the privilege of living for it.[2]

This has been a book about change, enforced change. It has mapped the rapid transition from wartime regimentation to individual responsibility, from intense homosociality to heteronormative expectations and from uniformed masculinity to domestic citizenship, all of which took place within a climate of emotional inarticulacy that did little to address the anxieties generated by such a radical upheaval in the psychic landscape of the nation.

Prosthetic Agency has explored some of the ways in which popular culture sought to mediate this difficult transition, examining the narratives it told, the plots it imagined, the props it deployed and the modes of masculinity it promoted as ideally suited to national reconstruction. Central to this story of reimagining postwar gender has been the man-making possibilities of work: the vital importance of shaving off rough edges and fitting the square pegs of demobilised masculinity into the round holes of civvy street. Work shapes the thrillers that build agency around the prosthetic possibilities of new technology, it is integral to the narratives of reconstitution generated by disabled autobiographers and it is at the heart of the fantasies of rehabilitation that fictionalise the repair of wounded men. Work is the agent that takes men away from the psychic disablements of passivity and domesticity – contaminated by long-established connections to the feminine – and assures them of their worth within the real or imagined male group. The plotting of work in this period assumes two distinct temporalities. Most of the men who feature in postwar thrillers are in some way set apart from their fellows, isolated or adrift. If all goes well across the course of their often perilous adventures, they will find themselves within the safe harbour of heteronormativity: wife, home, gainful occupation. In a space inimical to 'conventional' masculinity, a different plot emerges: the adventure of breadwinning and the establishment, in Michal Shapira's words, of the 'correct home and family'.[3] Thus, as end point or new beginning, domestic citizenship is essential to postwar male self-fashioning. Beyond its socially legitimate confines, men remain illegible, isolated, damaged. Paradoxically, the

heteronormative family that brings an end to romantic conceptions of male becoming also confirms male value and status.

Bringing the recalcitrant misfit heroes of thrillers and adventure stories safely home to roost is thus an integral part of postwar cultures of reconstruction. That so many of these maladjusted heroes were wounded – in physical, psychological or economic terms – speaks eloquently to the anxieties that surrounded demobilisation and, in their repeated tropes of damage and repair, the plots of the postwar worked urgently to reassure that what was broken could be fixed. Within this national fantasy of rehabilitation, however, more disruptive personal narratives emerged: veteran memoirs that, in offering a direct account of disablement, complicated the comforts of fiction and the linear plotting of reconstruction. In these narratives, writing itself becomes an assertion of agency, the reclamation of voice and value in the face of culturally feminising disability. In Chapter 4, I observed that burned airman William Simpson developed into a compulsive autobiographer, achieving a mode of prosthetic agency through the repeated retelling of his 'origin story': the experience of traumatic wounding that reconstituted him as a disabled man. In his final memoir, *I Burned My Fingers* (1955), Simpson paid tribute to an organisation that was integral to his transition from painfully visible exceptionalism to a desired state of ordinary domestic invisibility: the Guinea Pig Club. The Club, founded as a drinking society in 1941, evolved at war's end into a benevolent association designed to support the welfare, rehabilitation and resettlement of the men treated at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, the RAF's primary centre for burns and maxillofacial injuries.[4] The severity of the injuries confronting the hospital were unprecedented; the approach to treatment was revolutionary, and the driving force behind these innovations was Sir Archibald McIndoe, consultant plastic surgeon to the RAF. Famously, McIndoe's initiatives were not limited to the operating theatre, and his psycho-social approach to the treatment of men whose sense of self had been radically undermined by disfiguring and disabling injuries was enabled by a team of surgeons, specialists, nurses, administrators

and supporters within the RAF and locally.[5] Yet, as demobilisation gradually dispersed the close-knit community, something more was needed to ensure the physical – and, crucially, social – health of the Guinea Pigs, and that something would be *The Guinea Pig* magazine. The journal would prove both unusual and unusually long-lived, and one of the reasons for its success was the appointment as editor, from the third issue (July 1947) onwards, of Guinea Pig and cartoonist Henry Standen.[6] Under Standen, the publication evolved from a newsletter into a typeset magazine filled with articles, stories, news and illustrations, giving voice to its members and connecting Guinea Pigs across the globe. As a final instance of prosthetic agency, this coda turns from film, fiction, biography and the individual self-creation of memoir to the collaborative project of a magazine, and briefly considers what this 'group autobiography' might tell us about technology, disability and the narratives of postwar man-making.

The magazine's mission to mediate the transition from uniformed masculinity to domestic citizenship is immediately evident from its design. From Issue 3 to Issue 29, the cover showed two wounded guinea pigs (animal) waving pint glasses and talking animatedly, presumably about the exploits of two patched-up Guinea Pigs (human) who appear in an image bubble above their heads. These are the 'cover boys', one military and one civilian, who appear in a variety of scenes, building sandcastles, eating ice cream, taking snapshots, gardening, plucking daisies, sharing a pint and companionably stirring a Christmas pudding.[7] Standen's odd couple cover boys are a convivial component of an unashamedly cheerful cover; the iconography celebrates Piggery and indicates that while it has a serious purpose – the management of the transition to civvy street – it does not take itself too seriously. Much the same might be said of the contents.

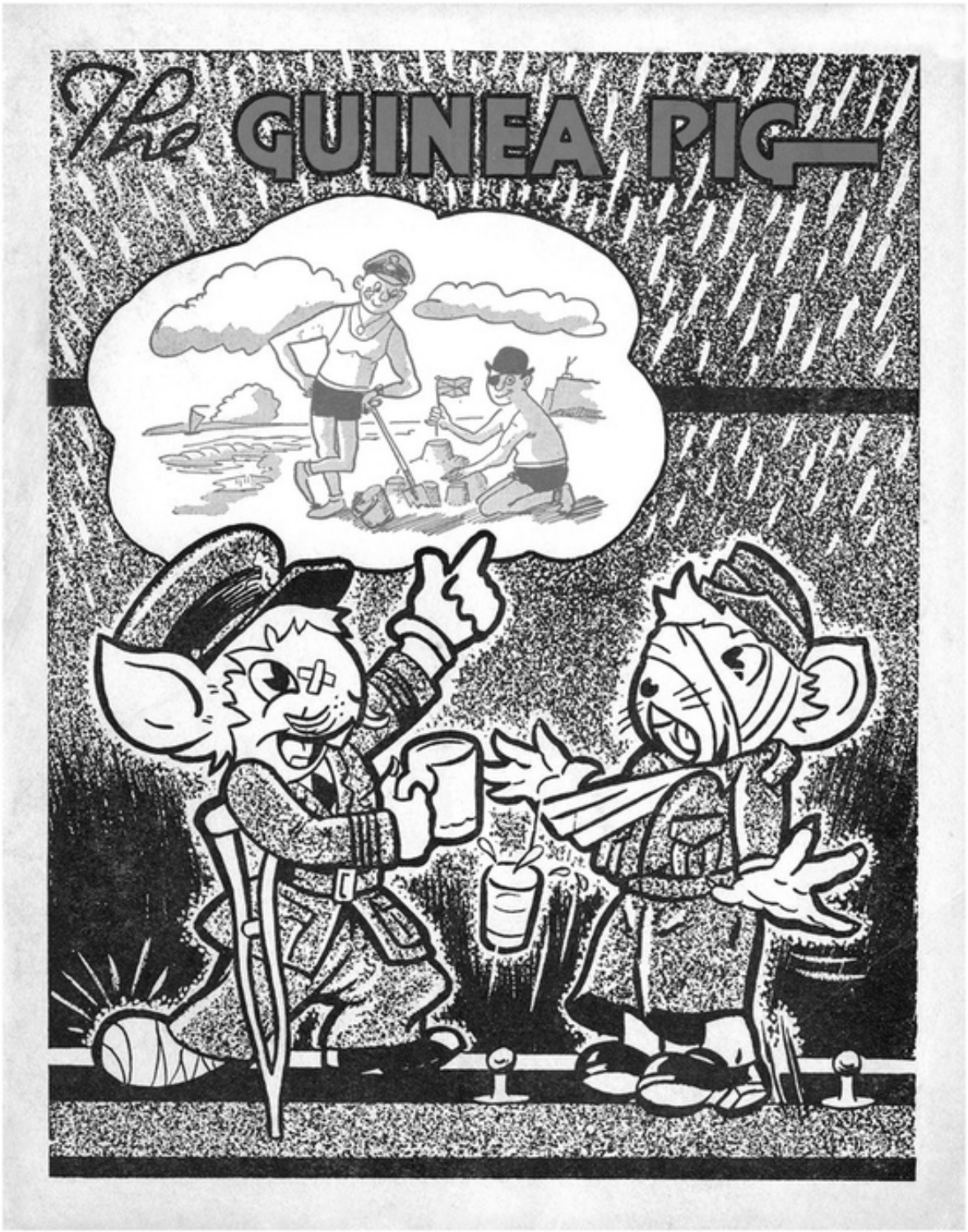

Illustration 7.1 Cover of *The Guinea Pig*, August 1953

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Illustration 7.2 ‘The Cover Boys’, from Edward Blacksell and Russell Davies, ‘Tribute to Henry Standen’, *The Guinea Pig*, Christmas 1957

Inside the magazine, regular features included an editorial, a 'Message from the Maestro' (McIndoe), and the popular 'Guinea Pigs on Parade': short newsy updates from Pigs dispersed across the world, reporting on work, health, adventures, weddings and families. Like a popular serial with familiar characters, or simply the updates of an extended family, the Pigs' variously smooth or rocky paths to matrimony, job security and stable domestic citizenship were mapped across the magazine's issues.[8] Such content is to be expected in a journal for a group of veterans united by common experience; what makes *The Guinea Pig* different is the extent to which it illustrates, and enjoys, the restorative value of storytelling. From the first issue onwards, the magazine is filled with retellings of the group's 'origin story'. In 'Group Captain Tells All', the Club's formation is conventionally presented by one of the founder members, Tom Gleave, and similar accounts follow in later editions.[9] By the third issue, however, a more uninhibited approach begins to emerge with the gender-inverted story of Dolly Daye-Dreme and the 'W.A.A.F. (Women's Amazon Air Force)'. This parodic romance was written as a response to reports of women being trained as aircrew, and while it has few literary merits, it is an enjoyably silly retelling of the myth.[10] Dolly's misadventures as a Guinea Doe – carried away by celebrity, she jilts her devoted ground crew lover – set a precedent, and soon, ever more absurd retellings of East Grinstead mythology began to emerge from a variety of contributors. These narratives are seldom sophisticated, but neither are they simply puerile; rather, they are creative engagements with genre and current events that celebrate the Club's ethos while plotting the Guinea Pigs' progress through the postwar world.

A brief survey encapsulates the anarchic imagination of the magazine. Contributors had a fondness for parody, and no genre was spared. There is a ghost story in which the spectres are scared away by the sight of a meaty pedicle attached to the narrator's face, while in 'High Noon at Grinstead Gulch', guinea pig rustling turns out simply to be the Pigs gathering for an 'annual pilgrimage'.[11]

Damon Runyan is appropriated for a crime story; the school story is reinscribed in the 'Fifth Form at St Dermatomes'; classical myths are reimagined when Flight-Sergeant Perseus is dispatched on Operation Gorgon, and there is even, in 'The Knife's Progress', a Guinea Pig ballet, replete with in-jokes: 'The nurse dances lightly round, adjusting this and that, does a couple of *entrechats* and drops the McInsky forceps on the floor. As she stands aghast, the outraged Sister enters, and in a dance full of opportunities for technical virtuosity, expresses the importance of non-touch technique.'[12] Christmas issues brought pantomimes, and reams of doggerel verse, usually contributed by the poet laureate (or, perhaps, the McGonagall) of Piggery, Harry Morson.[13] Finally, in 1952, the magazine outdid itself by attempting a pastiche of the popular BBC radio sketch show *Take It from Here*, which starred Jimmy Edwards, a supporter of the Club.[14]

Much of this content was written by Standen, who frequently took inspiration from current events. Prompted by 'all the flap and hoo-ha' about flying saucers in America, he produces a science fiction story about a Martian who decides not to emigrate after witnessing a fairly typical night's drinking on the hospital's notorious Ward III.[15] In 1955, he responds to the glut of POW escape stories appearing in print and on screen by recounting the tale of a man who drove the Germans to distraction by a numbing command of protocol and a persistent refusal to escape.[16] In a more satirical vein, in August 1951, Standen proposes a 'Guinea Pig Festival'. Observing that the real purpose of the Festival of Britain is to get hard currency from foreign visitors, in particular Americans, and reading in the press about proposed 'attractions', he dreams about a contribution from the 'world famous' Guinea Pig Club. Monetising the culture of spectacle, Standen turns the operating theatre into a stage, with an 'All Star Caste [sic] of Eminent Surgeons and Beautiful Nurses'. It is not the 'extraordinary bodies' of the Pigs that are on display but the marvels of British medical engineering: the programme lists a rhinoplasty and a rotation flap. The visiting

Americans are entranced and drive away happy, their son playing cheerfully with his souvenir glass eye.[17] Perhaps the best example, though, of the care that went into imagining Guinea Pig worlds is provided by 'Amazing Discovery at East Grinstead: Archaeologist Makes History', which appeared in 1949, perhaps in response to Max Mallowan's discoveries in Nimrud. The piece imagines the unearthing of a potsherd that sheds light on the 'creed of Guinea Piggery as practiced in the twentieth century' and is illustrated by one of Standen's most beautifully conceived cartoons.[18] Written in a mock biblical register, the familiar story is told with liberal doses of bathos:

> Then it was that the greviously [sic] hurt warriors were gathered up and were taken to the tent of the great physician, that they could rest and be succoured and be made whole again. And some of the warriors were grievously sick and unwell of spirit; some there were who said: O woe is me, verily I have had my chips; and some who said O calamity, indeed have I had my lot; and others who said: Sad is my fate indeed, I should not have joined.
>
> But the great Mak-n-Do was among them and said: Despair not, for ye shall be made whole again. Grieve not for the body that is cooked and the visage that is fried, for ye shall leave my tent even as new men, and walk again proud of mien and attractive to look upon, so that maidens shall sigh and flutter their eyes as ye pass them by.
>
> And at that did the warriors perk up considerably.[19]

The story continues through rituals of chopping and drinking to the formation of the 'Ghinnypigz' and concludes with the knighthood conferred on 'Sur-Archee-Mak-N-Do' in 1947.

Illustration 7.3 'Amazing Discovery at East Grinstead', *The Guinea Pig*, April 1949 (McIndoe is front centre holding the chopper – anaesthetist John Hunter holds the syringe)

The Guinea Pig, then, is a riot of appropriation, approximation and textual play that vehemently rejects conventional narratives of disability and disfigurement. This refusal of familiar figurations of impairment also shapes the more serious aspects of the magazine. *The Guinea Pig* is a journal of travel and adventure, a yearbook of work and the professions, an ongoing treatise on rehabilitation and a social network far in advance of its time. Contributors write to tell of their experiences across a variety of jobs and hobbies from shopkeeping to farming, teaching, mining, architecture, management, manufacturing, bulb-growing, motor racing, boating and photography. Scottish Guinea Pig Ian Craig writes regularly about his outdoor adventures; Jack Allaway reports on joining Butlins; Godfrey Edmonds – a man whose burns were so severe that even McIndoe despaired – tells of his dry-cleaning business in South Africa.[20] As indicated earlier, the networking features of the magazine were particularly valued, but maintaining the network was

a challenge: Standen is obliged to demand, time and again, that individual Pigs contribute to the group and reinforce their identity as community members:

> The most eagerly-read portion of *The Guinea Pig* remains 'Guinea Pigs on Parade'. It is in fact the keystone about which this magazine is built, and practically every letter we receive expresses the writer's appreciation of this collection of personal paragraphs.
>
> The feature should have *your* name on it. News of Guinea Pigs means news of *you*. You are the person about whom, and from whom, we want to hear – you personally. After all it doesn't cost much time and money to write a few lines saying how you are progressing, what you are doing, and what your plans are; and it is a fact that your fellow-Pigs are interested in news of you.[21]

Reports of Guinea Pig activity are often remarkable but are seldom framed in inspirational terms; rather, they are imparted tongue-in-cheek, adopting a bantering tone that simultaneously recognises and ridicules achievement.[22] The doublespeak of banter, along with comic hyperbole and strategic euphemism, serves a valuable purpose, as it did in wartime, enabling affection, approbation and concern to be expressed without threatening the boundaries of male propriety or risking displays of inappropriate emotion. An element of restlessness also emerges from these pages. Not all Guinea Pigs settle easily, and the search for acceptable modes of man-making risk is evident in, for example, Peter Goodman's brief account of his postwar motorcycle-racing career, which culminates in a crash at the Strasbourg Grand Prix that leaves him with a skull fracture and meningitis. Recovering sufficiently to get married, he finally decides to call it a day. The affirmations of adventure are equally at play in the article 'Manitoba's Flying Pig', which, in its account of forest protection and air rescue, could have come straight from a Hammond Innes novel.[23] Within this framework, the reports of jobs,

careers and travel serve a valuable purpose, communicating possibility – and reassurance – to Guinea Pigs through technical language: a discourse that connects men across classes and nations in this period. This is the medicine of 'work' that has been so central to my concerns.

As this overview indicates, the discursive register of the magazine fluctuated between practical advice and absurdity, but it also permitted straight talking and moments of carefully calibrated rhetoric. The rare privilege of direct speech is primarily granted to McIndoe, but it is also permitted to Edward Blacksell ('Blackie'), and these two men articulate some of the substantial challenges of adjustment which the magazine otherwise seeks to gloss over. A telling example is provided by Blacksell's 'How to Make a Silk Purse from a Sow's Ear', which addresses fatherhood. Acknowledging that 'Pigs with young' might be facing behavioural problems, he counsels against 'brute force': 'If he is weak, you break his will; if he is strong, you make him hate you, neither of which is desirable.'[24] Blackie says nothing more but simply adds that if he can be of help 'at any time', Pigs should write and ask. This short article, a tiny fragment among the confident assertions of Pigs' domestic citizenship, is a reminder of the long-term difficulties – both physical and psychic – generated by these men's wounds and of adjustment problems facing demobilised men more broadly.

McIndoe's contributions, by contrast, act as a reminder that the Pigs' status as viable male subjects needed constant reiteration, and he repeatedly stresses the importance of taking proactive control of the differently disabling transition to postwar life. His 'Maestro's Message', delivered in person at the annual reunion and reported in the Christmas issue of the magazine, both celebrates the achievements of the Club and works, psychologically, to reinforce its core rehabilitative purpose. To this end, McIndoe adjusts his message as time passes. In 1949, the tenth anniversary of the 'basic reason for Guinea Piggery', he announces the end of 'Operation Knife', the first phase of an 'experiment' which has 'flowered into …

the most extraordinary organisation in the British Empire', and its replacement with what he terms 'Operation Get Cracking'. As he looks out at the assembled Guinea Pigs, he applauds their resilience and turns the process of their readjustment into a heroic quest against the forces of postwar conformity:

> I make no excuse for restating what I believe to be fundamental in Guinea Piggery. … It is that every Guinea Pig is an individual with a dignity of his own, rights and privileges which are inalienable. That is the bottomless well from which he draws his strength, his desire for life and his keen pursuit of freedom and happiness. Everything in Guinea Piggery is subservient to that central fact. Remove the stultifying effects of regimentation and bureaucracy from men's minds and there is little need for much of what passes for welfare today.[25]

Given the right conditions, a Guinea Pig can achieve anything; the challenges he faces emerge from the denuded state of the postwar world, not from any lack among the Pigs themselves. But McIndoe does not stop there; indeed, arguing that Britain is facing an internal threat as serious as the external menace of 1941, he goes on to figure his veterans as agents of national redemption:

> You who have plumbed the depths and know the answers and who are now on the way up must look around you as you go. Communicate that press-on spirit to your communities for … a society in which each member concentrates on getting rather than on giving has lost the roots of its stability. As a result of your experiences you are not changed or different men. You are only the same men modified, but your perception has been sharpened and you are quicker to appreciate the truth or falseness of a situation than others who have not endured what you have. Therefore give heed to what is happening around you and do something to rid the country of the cancer which is gnawing at its vitals.[26]

Is McIndoe fighting one myth with another, replacing cultural assumptions surrounding impairment with what Lennard Davis terms the myths of disabled wisdom?[27] This seems unlikely, not least because McIndoe regarded many of his Pigs in a more paternal light. They were damaged cadet figures rather than men wise beyond their years. More plausibly, we might read the speech as an act of interpellation. McIndoe, embodying the authority of the establishment as surgeon and knight of the realm, insists the Guinea Pigs are 'bodies that matter', and he frames them wholly *within* the structures of domestic citizenship.[28] They are part of the national community and have responsibilities as such. That his performatives succeeded – that his statements as well as his surgery in some sense 'made' the Guinea Pigs – is evident from articles such as Jack Allaway's 'Get Cracking' and in the gradual mutation of the Club and its magazine.[29] As Pigs grow up and into their postwar roles, their radical otherness and boisterous self-presentation dissolves. By the 1960s, the magazine has become a forum for middle-aged men, their wives and children, boasting regular advertising by Marks and Spencer and an ability to support the wider community. Guinea Pig Neville Gunnis encapsulates the transition:[30]

> Now I feel the second chapter of the Guinea Pig Club – Rehabilitation – is ending, and a very important third is beginning … We have much to give – strength of character, experience, sympathetic understanding, courage … And so I propose that this Club take unto itself a purpose for existing, by sponsoring, supporting, or otherwise lending aid to people not quite so fortunate as ourselves.[31]

In this transformation, the wartime group, embedded within – and propping up – the structures of domestic citizenship, becomes an exemplary prosthetic agent.

Prosthetic Agency, as book and concept, has also been centrally concerned with technology, and with the machines, ideas and

objects that enabled masculinity in the postwar years. The heroes of Nevil Shute adopted a creed of 'maintenance', encapsulating both self-discipline and mechanics; those of Hammond Innes found redemption through work, while proving themselves in conflict with elemental forces and meteorological extremes. As for Nigel Balchin, he possessed, in the words of Philip Toynbee, 'a vivid perception of the artistic possibilities in technical information'.[32] The cinema, meanwhile, showed us aviation itself making the transition to domestic citizenship. While *The Sound Barrier* might have imagined a new technological frontier replete with risk, for the most part, the emergent jet age was configured in terms of comfort and safety. The technological future was to be quotidian and down to earth. In such a context, it is perhaps unsurprising to find the language of mechanical pragmatism invading the medical profession. In Leonard Mosley's 1962 biography, McIndoe appears as 'a tough professional technician for whom surgery was "just a good plumbing job"'.[33] Figuring McIndoe and the bodies upon which he operates in these terms keeps him safely on the right side of science: the practical man, not the dangerous theoretician. And it aligns him with what might be termed 'manual articulacy', the language through which male subjectivity in this period was predominantly configured. Hands doing work communicated male competence and expressed more than the limited discourses available to mid-century masculinity could convey.[34]

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the innovative medical technologies that quite literally shaped the Guinea Pigs and were integral to their social rehabilitation. Plastic surgery was a young, and not particularly fashionable, specialism, and while remarkable advances had been achieved under Harold Gillies during the First World War, there were in 1939 only four full-time plastic surgeons operating in Britain.[35] The novelty of the profession is significant, and a contributory factor in its capacity to shift the paradigms shaping medical practice. McIndoe and his team were treating a new mode of injury, and they had unparalleled opportunities to practice

thanks to the Battle of Britain and the bombing war that followed. Outdated and actively damaging treatments were rejected, often in the face of opposition from, or ignorance within, the medical profession, while new emergency medicines enabled more effective intervention before wounded men reached East Grinstead.[36] But beyond these practical developments, plastic surgery consolidated its position as a non-normative mode of medicine. It does not deal, per se, with disease; it deals instead with reconstruction.[37] It is primarily concerned with functionality and with quality of life. McIndoe developed new procedures for the making good of faces missing eyelids, noses and lips, moving flesh about the human body in a complex logistics of repair; he also attended to the psychic rehabilitation of his patients, involving them in the processes of their own care, encouraging them to watch operations and to understand what was being done and why.[38] Bill Simpson's description of himself as a work in progress is echoed time and again in the rhetoric of running repairs that attends the Guinea Pigs' postwar lives.[39] The weekend reunions included a 'full service check' from McIndoe; this encouragement to think of the damaged body as a machine that could be grafted, tweaked, tuned and coaxed back to full operating order not only evokes Douglas Bader's metal 'undercarriage' but also can be seen as a discursive practice ideally suited to a cohort of patients in their early twenties, whose adult lives had to that point largely been preoccupied with the prosthetic agency of Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancaster bombers.[40] McIndoe's patients were guinea pigs in a literal as well as a figurative sense, test pilots for treatments that would revolutionise postwar medicine.

While McIndoe made the Guinea Pigs possible, the ideological achievement of the Club and its magazine extends far beyond his agency. Mayhew's history stresses the importance of the 'therapeutic community' – understood as the RAF, the hospital and the town – but demobilisation and domestic citizenship were the antithesis of such communities. Indeed, they threatened to reinstate pre-war hierarchies and undo new-found understandings of cultural

value. It is here that reading the journal as a group autobiography does much to explain its rehabilitative success. G. Thomas Couser's contention that 'in writing one's life one may bring a new self into being' is enacted on a mass scale.[41] Guinea Pigs writing for *The Guinea Pig* bring viable postwar selves into being both for themselves and for those unable or unwilling to write. The magazine creates a space of possibility and provides, repeatedly, a mode of constitutional reinforcement, asserting that the disabled and disfigured qualify not just as Pigs but as men. In the language of the Pigs, the term 'constitutional reinforcement' would undoubtedly refer to a swift pint taken en route to a job interview, and in some sense, that is exactly what the magazine provides. It offers a virtual homosocial environment that offsets the losses of demobilisation, becoming a space of writing that enables public agency and a troubleshooting mechanism for defusing the difficulties of domestic citizenship. The composite features of the magazine together become prosthetic, taking the place of uniform, hospital and the nurturing sociability of East Grinstead, packaging the therapeutic community into a condensed form that can infiltrate civvy street and suburbia, countering isolation and forging a global network of new-made men. Jacques-Henri Stiker, whose work profitably scrutinises twentieth-century cultures of rehabilitation, defines the prosthetic as 'the very idea that you can *replace*'; he also suggests that this process seeks to eradicate difference, making the aberrant other fit invisibly into the norm.[42] The Guinea Pig Club, while aligned with the first of these contentions, troubles – indeed, undermines – the second. This radical formulation of community cuts across conventional social structures to complicate the primacy of assimilation; it illustrates what happens when structures of affiliation are viewed not primarily through class, nation or gender but through the fracturing of subjectivity represented by acquired disability. One of McIndoe's most significant and radical innovations was the abolition of rank on his wards.[43] This was a random cross-class, cross-region, cross-national community assembled through (ill) chance and sustained by an exclusive experience that no one would

welcome.[44] It successfully works to insert its members into normative invisibility – work, marriage, children – while simultaneously insisting upon their absolute difference, and the confident public display of their ultimate irreparability.

The legacies of war were indelibly inscribed on the faces and bodies of the Guinea Pigs, yet the group survived thanks to an unprecedented, and productively disorderly, context of rehabilitation. The role of luck in bringing together an exceptional group of doctors and administrators cannot be overlooked, but the early days of the long-lived *Guinea Pig* magazine are also testament both to writing's self-constituting power and the psychic value of homosociality in an increasingly atomised postwar culture. Guinea Pigs had a community; the simultaneously less and more fortunate mass of demobbed soldiers, sailors and airmen often did not, and for them, the transition to domestic citizenship could be fraught, lonely and profoundly destabilising. The currency of male value had changed; the nostalgically remembered home had changed; the 'privilege of living' for one's country was more complex than imagined. Small wonder, then, that the fictions of prosthetic agency, on screen or on the page, found such traction in the postwar period.

[1] Brian Birks, 'Round Pigs in Round Holes', *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 3, July 1947, 15.

[2] Archibald McIndoe, 'An Open Letter from the Maestro', *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 1, nd, 2.

[3] Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 113.

[4] The origins and constitution of the Club are discussed in Chapter 4.

[5] Leonard Mosley, *Faces from the Fire: The Biography of Sir Archibald McIndoe*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, 94–95. Of particular importance to the postwar welfare of the Guinea Pigs were RAF welfare sergeant, later warrant officer, Edward Blacksell and anaesthetist Dr Russell Davies. 'Blackie', who returned to teaching after the war, remained an unofficial social worker to the Guinea Pigs throughout his life; Davies became an expert on pensions, navigating the opaque and often inexplicable processes through which long-term disability was evaluated. See Edward Bishop, *McIndoe's Army* (1963), London: Grub Street, 2001, 19–44.

[6] The first newsletter is undated, and probably appeared in late 1944 or early 1945; the magazine's final issue appeared in 2007. It was sent, free of charge, to all members of the Club (the Club's archive, housed at the East Grinstead Museum, lists 649 members: www.eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk/guinea-pig-club). Standen was one of the Club's most severely injured members, sustaining serious damage to his hands and eyes as well as his face. He nonetheless enjoyed a career in the oil industry, and apart from a temporary break from 1957 to 1962 edited the magazine until the year before his death in January 1983. A portrait of him and his wife Ann, who took a key role in organising Guinea Pig activities, appears in Peter Williams and Ted Harrison, *McIndoe's Army: The Injured Airmen Who Faced the World*, London: Pelham Books, 1979, 125–35.

[7] After many appearances, these figures began to prompt debate, and a short explanatory note was provided: 'the two cover boys are not intended to be two individual Guinea Pigs: they are an amalgam of all Guinea Pigs. As the Guinea Pig Club now consists of both serving R.A.F. flying personnel and ex-flying Civvy Types one of the characters is shown as a battered R.A.F. bod and the

other as an equally battered bowler-hatted Civilian (Mk.IIb)' (*The Guinea Pig*, Issue 10, Christmas 1949, 42).

[8] Sam Gallop, for example, receives a profile in the regular back-page feature 'Who's Who in the Guinea Pig Club' (Issue 11). In Issue 13, he is congratulated on his wedding, and in Issue 15, the imminent arrival of the 'stork' is celebrated. The stork was the magazine's preferred euphemism for childbirth, and associated flight-related puns proliferated in the news columns.

[9] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 1, nd, 3–4. Straightforward accounts also appear in Issues 6 (August 1948) and 7 (Christmas 1948). A personal account of 'how I ended up in the squadron's favourite hospital' appears in Issue 4 (Christmas 1947, 25), while Issue 9 (August 1949) includes 'How a Guinea Pig Is Made', an excerpt from Tom Gleave's *I Had a Row with a German* (9–13).

[10] *The Guinea Pig*, July 1947, 16–17. The humour is broad, except when Dolly goes under the knife in Chapter III. Chapters IV, V, VI and 'up to Chapter XXXIX (inclusive)' have no content except 'see Chapter III'.

[11] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 4, December 1947, 6–7; Issue 22, Christmas 1953, 25.

[12] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 14, April 1951, 6–12; Ibid., 14–15; 'Get Your Culture Here', Issue 12, August 1950, 24–27; 'The Knife's Progress', Issue 21, August 1953, 22. In a nod to Britain's premier interwar ballet company, the Vic-Wells, this dance is presented by 'The Queen Vic. Company (in conjunction with the Grafters' Wells Ballet)'.

[13] The tenor of Morson's verse is best encapsulated by a limerick which may or may not be his work: 'There once was a drivelling Bard/ Who never paid any regard/ To rhythm or sense/ And saw no offence/ In writing blank verse by the yard' (*The Guinea Pig*, Issue 13, Christmas 1950, 24).

[14] *The Guinea* Pig, Issue 17, April 1952, 28–32. The bulk of this contribution depends too much on knowledge of the show to retain its impact, but the concluding Sherlock Holmes story, 'The Case of the Missing Toupée', is another example of generic appropriation for Guinea Pig purposes.

[15] 'The Truth about … The Flying Saucers', *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 11, April 1950.

[16] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 26, August 1955, 19–23. One of these stories was by a Guinea Pig. Richard Pape's disturbing autobiography, *Boldness Be My Friend* (1953), was dedicated to the Club and McIndoe.

[17] 'A Guinea Pig Festival', *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 15, August 1951, 24–26.

[18] In this instance, I do not know for sure whether the text is by Standen, but the drawing is his work. Although guest cartoons were gifted by prominent newspaper artists, Standen drew most of the pictures in the magazine.

[19] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 9, August 1949, 33.

[20] In a robust reminder of the broader attitudes of the postwar era, the magazine contains several reports of safaris (including a photograph of McIndoe with an elephant he has killed) and many accounts of men working within colonial services or industries. The Empire is seen, unreflectively, as a space of opportunity for Guinea Pigs and a proving ground for adventurous men.

[21] Editorial, *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 8, April 1949, 3. This issue is packed with informative features, from Ian Craig's assault on Ben Nevis, to Sid McQuillan's visit to a coal mine and Jack Treagust's evocatively entitled 'Something about Cables'.

[22] There are exceptions, and the same information can appear in significantly different tones. When one of the most severely wounded Pigs, Bill Foxley, takes up athletics, it is first reported as a comic account of a disfigured man frightening the horses of normativity (Issue 9, August 1949, 28). But when he is profiled in the magazine's 'Who's Who' feature, he is acknowledged as 'a sheer example of a Guinea Pig with plenty of backbone' (Issue 13, Christmas 1950, 60).

[23] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 8, April 1949, 16–17; Issue 9, August 1949, 29–31.

[24] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 8, 12.

[25] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 10, Christmas 1949, 4.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, London: Verso, 1995, 106. Ato Quayson also notes the type of 'a disabled character/god who provides superior insights into the phenomenal world' (*Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 47).

[28] I use Judith Butler's phrase to evoke the role of performatives in rendering the subject culturally legible (*Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 225–26), but my reading is also indebted to her discussion of 'coalitional citizenship'. Although emerging from the very different context of twenty-first century warfare, Butler's analysis of the presuppositions of 'normative frameworks' resonates with my concerns: 'Apart from the question of who confers recognition and what form it takes, we also have to ask what is it precisely that would be "recognized"? Is it the "homosexuality" of the gay person? Is it the religious belief of the Muslim?' Is it, we might ask, the disability of the Guinea Pig? (*Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London: Verso, 2009, 141.)

[29] *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 13, Christmas 1950, 33–34.

[30] Standen's editorial break represents a significant point of transition. Issue 30, Christmas 1957 – edited by Sam Gallop – has a new design, a rather more restrained cover and a new feature, 'Mixed Bathing', aimed at 'Guinea Pig Wives'. As the Club evolved, many Guinea Pigs went on to provide the benefits of their experience to the wider community, as the badly burned Falklands War veteran Simon Weston testified in a 1991 episode of *This Is Your Life* dedicated to Tom Gleave.

[31] Neville Gunnis, 'A Purpose for the Club', *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 26, August 1955, 4.

[32] Philip Toynbee, 1944; quoted in Derek Collett, *His Own Executioner: The Life of Nigel Balchin*, Bristol: SilverWood Books, 2015, 156.

[33] Mosley, *Faces from the Fire*, 93.

[34] McIndoe encouraged visibility, so much so that the Guinea Pigs achieved a degree of celebrity status. But equally important, and perhaps ultimately more significant than his emphasis on Pigs taking their new faces out into the world, was his determination to craft functioning hands. From Ivor Gates's bitter reflection on the need for hands to hold everything of significance in life – from wine to women – to Hammond Innes's skilled engineers at their lathes, hands succinctly function to symbolise male agency.

[35] Mosley, *Faces from the Fire*, 79.

[36] Emily Mayhew, *The Guinea Pig Club: Archibald McIndoe and the RAF in World War II* (2004), Barnsley: Greenhill Books, 2018, 95–96.

[37] 'McIndoe's patients', writes Mosley, 'may have been wounded but they certainly were not sick' (*Faces from the Fire*, 98).

[38] McIndoe regretted that the one thing he couldn't do convincingly was construct a new ear (Ibid., 139). The radical innovation of encouraging patients to become experts in their own conditions is discussed by Mosley (106) and Bishop, *McIndoe's*

Army, 41–44. A personal account of the techniques and logistics of repair is provided by Henry Standen, ‘I Wanted a New Nose’, *Strand*, January 1944, 62–64.

[39] William Simpson, *The Way of Recovery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944, 132.

[40] Paul Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky* (1954), London: Cassell, 2000, 87.

[41] G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 14.

[42] Jacques-Henri Stiker, *A History of Disability* (1982), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, 123–24, 134–38.

[43] Mosley, *Faces from the Fire*, 101; Bishop, *McIndoe’s Army*, 22.

[44] ‘It has been described as the most exclusive club in the world, the entrance fee is something most men would not care to pay’ (‘The Maestro’s Letter’, *The Guinea Pig*, Issue 3, July 1947, 3).

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